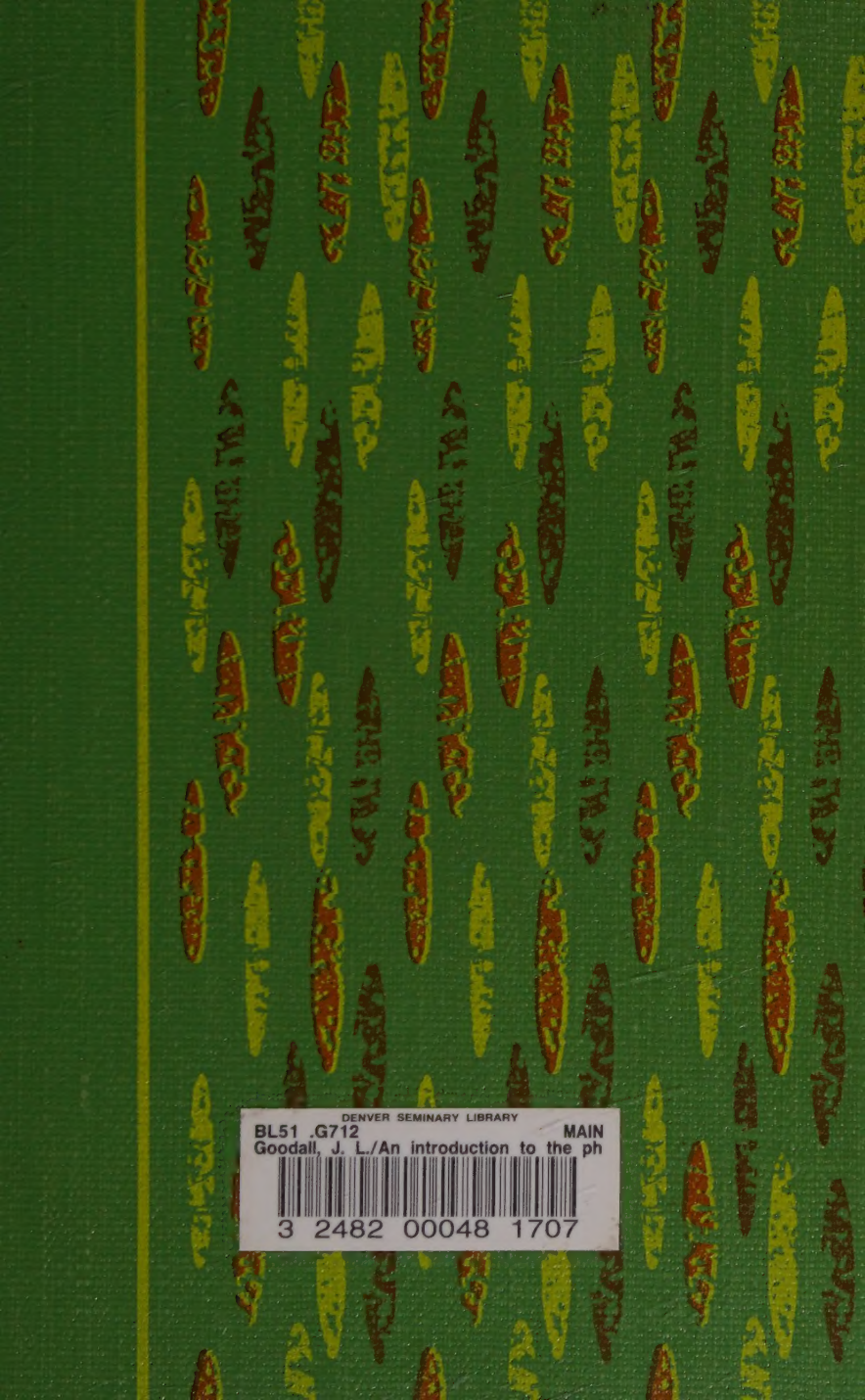
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An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion

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Preface

The purpose of this book is to provide an introduction to Christian thinking for the non-specialist. I have attempted to meet two needs. The first is for an understanding of the intellectual crisis which has confronted the Christian in the last few decades. In the first three chapters, I describe the origin and nature of the new movement in secular philosophy and the radical challenge which it has made to traditional Christian thought and language, together with an indication of some of the ways in which this challenge has been met.

The second need is for a positive approach. There can, of course, be no definitive Christian philosophy, and each age sponsors its distinctive formulation of the truth in Christ. I believe that the main lines of such a formulation in our own day are now to be discerned. Moreover, as debate continues, the interested student is too often confronted with expositions which, to him at least, appear bewilderingly negative, or perplexingly non-committal. There is need, in fact, for a provisional presentation of the Christian position, a mapping of the ground on which the Christian may stand and remain intellectually respectable. Accordingly, in chapters four to nine, I have endeavoured to outline a positive and consistent picture which will be intelligible to the beginner in philosophic thinking.

No knowledge of traditional philosophy is assumed, and the brief summary of the thought of Plato and Aristotle in Appendix 1 is intended to make more explicit, and to supplement, some references in the main text. Appendix 2 is designed to help those who have met difficulty in reading early Christian doctrine. It relates some central themes of early developments to contemporary thought.

The difficulty of popular philosophic writing is to sustain both the popularity and the philosophy. But I hope that the use of homely illustrations will help the general reader to keep up with the philosophy; and that the professional will not feel that weighty matters receive too slight a treatment. If I start more hares than I run down, it is in the hope that the reader will be sufficiently stimulated to take up the chase for himself. I append a reading list for this purpose.

It would be difficult to express fully the extent of my debt to the Reverend Professor I. T. Ramsey, of Oriel College, Oxford. I thank him for permission to use the examples of the 'infinite polygon' and the 'infinite sum', as well as other terms from his *Religious Language*, and also for his great kindness in reading the MS, and in making many helpful suggestions.

J.L.G.

St Luke's College
Exeter 1966

I

The World of the Unicorn

Contexts and meanings

'This morning,' I remark excitedly, 'I saw a splendid unicorn.' Some look blank, others perplexed. No one returns my interest. Only friends show concern, but not apparently, with unicorns. All of them, that is, except one. 'Really?' says he, with enthusiasm. 'Do show me!' For he and I share an interest. Men in the Middle Ages thought that there were moral lessons to be learned from fabulous beasts, such as the phoenix, the salamander, and the unicorn. They depicted such monsters with imaginative artistry in 'bestiaries'. My friend and I enjoy searching out these curiosities. He is therefore the only person I know to whom I can say 'I saw a unicorn', and meet with an understanding response.

Consider the reaction of other people. To most, nothing was communicated. To others, even to say 'Unicorns don't exist' seemed hardly worth while. All were more interested in what prompted me to make the remark than in what it actually said. All except for the man who happened to know the specialised context – a context where talk about salamanders and unicorns is sensible and serious. I did not bother, in my excitement, to tell the others about this special context, and so misunderstanding arose. This is of course an extreme case. In all our ordinary talk, the meanings we intend are determined by the context in a similar way. There are few mistakes, because the contexts are fairly clear. For instance, we do not expect to see a girl with hair the colour of a pillar box, not at least in the present state of fashion. But we say 'My girl has red hair', and 'Pillarboxes are red' without confusion. The word 'hair' points to the way 'red' is being used

in the first case, and 'pillarboxes' to the way it is being used in the second. Customary usage helps us to understand. It is not a matter of grammar. The following sentences are grammatically on all fours: 'All angles of an equilateral triangle are equal.' 'All men before the law are equal.' Dictionaries tell us some of the different meanings for different contexts, but only experience can sort them out, and tell us which is which.

It is not surprising, therefore, that when the context (or 'sphere of discourse') is not made clear, or when the speaker is not really clear himself, there is ambiguity, and failure to communicate. There is a story of the demonstration of an electronic machine for translating between Russian and English. Its performance with commercial and scientific data was most impressive. But then one of the spectators of the demonstration fed into the machine the statement 'The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak.' The result caused some little puzzlement to the Russian speakers present, and it was retranslated. It then read 'The whisky is agreeable but the meat is a little strong.'

If we find this amusing, it is because contexts have become mixed. No one told the machine that 'flesh' and 'spirit' were not being used here as they are used by butchers and licensed victuallers, but as they are used in a religious sense in the Bible. A matter of fact person might observe at this point that a lot of words in the Bible, and in religion generally, have odd meanings, which are rather different from their ordinary meanings, or, as he might say, their 'real' meanings.

Now the notion that each word has a 'real' meaning goes very far back in human thinking, to a primitive stage of understanding. The name of a thing was somehow part of it, in the same way as the name of a man is thought by primitive people to be somehow part of him. Many operations of magic are based on the assumption that to know the names of things and people is to have power over them – manipulating the names in magical practice will affect the things or people named. Hence, for instance, a custom among the Zulus, whereby a woman is not only forbidden to pronounce her husband's name,

but also may not use any of its syllables which occur in other words. So that only intimate acquaintance with the language makes conversation with married women possible. Again, the Greeks chanced to have a word which meant both 'people' and 'stone'. So in order to show that they were really the same, they contrived a legend of men springing from stones scattered on the ground.

The truth is, of course, that the names of things are what they are simply by convention and general agreement. Different languages are the most obvious cases of different conventions. Kinchinjunga and Godwin Austen are both proper names, in different languages, for the same mountain. 'Hirondelle' and 'swallow' are common nouns for the same species. But within the same language we may have different conventions. Godwin Austen is denoted by K_2 in the original survey, so that cartographers might use this term instead. In the sphere of discourse of the ornithologist, 'swallow' might be replaced by 'summer migrant'.

In many cases, the sphere of discourse to which a statement belongs can be established fairly easily. 'The flamingo has webbed feet.' This is a fact of natural history which we can check; a curiosity in a wading bird which if we are zoologists or ornithologists, we do well to note. 'The unicorn has a horned head.' If at first we think that this is also a fact of natural history we soon learn better. 'Show me a flamingo,' we may say; and the result is a trip to the zoo. 'Show me your unicorn,' someone may say to me; and the result is a trip to a library. The word 'unicorn' might have stood for an animal: but in fact the only *thing* in the world to which it refers is a picture in a book. This saves us asking irrelevant questions, such as 'Where does it live? What does it eat?' We realise that the only appropriate questions are of the kind 'Who drew it? What school of illustrators did he belong to? What was he trying to convey by it?'

The demand 'Show me . . .' obviously provides a useful test. One is tempted to say that it shows which things are real and which are not. But a moment's thought will show us that this will not quite do. A unicorn in a Bodleian Library bestiary

is as real a thing as a flamingo on Lake Nakuru. It is better to say that our simple test helps us to ask the right sorts of questions about objects for which our words stand. It shows us that 'unicorn', which we once thought belonged to the sphere of discourse of the zoologist, in truth belongs to the sphere of discourse of the antiquarian. The test appeals of course to experience – experience of seeing, hearing, touching, smelling. We call this sense-experience, to distinguish it from experience of other kinds – mental, or emotional. The test assumes that anyone will have the same sense-experience if he puts himself in the right place to have it – in this case the Bodleian, or the shore of Lake Nakuru. It is in fact an 'empirical' test. The method of gaining knowledge by continually testing in this way is called empiricism.

Now, all the foregoing is fairly obvious. But we have been taking the first steps in philosophy. An important task for the philosopher is clarification. Where words can belong to more than one sphere, he saves us from error by allotting particular instances of their use to the right one. Some spheres of discourse relate to areas of fact which are quite distinct. Difficulties arise when different spheres of discourse are relevant to the same facts. I perform a simple action, such as raising a glass to my lips. The sphere of anatomy will talk in terms of the mechanics of the operation. The sphere of psychology will talk in terms of the mental processes involved. In yet another sphere, the process will be evaluated. The moralist, noting the frequency of the action and the contents of the glass, may want to describe the process as intemperate. This does not so much describe, as pass judgment. It is, as we say, evaluative. The moral sphere of discourse is wholly evaluative, being concerned with approval and disapproval, with commending or forbidding. Where we need to be especially careful is in those spheres of discourse which make use of terms which are both descriptive and evaluative. A weapon may in rocketry be described simply as an intercontinental missile. In the sphere of politics, however, it may be referred to as a deterrent. This is descriptive in so far as it indicates an important element in strategy. But it is also evaluative, indicating that the speaker thinks that

such powerful weapons are both politically effective, and morally justifiable.

The philosopher also examines spheres of discourse as wholes, determining their relative value. They must stand up to certain tests. They must for instance be self-consistent, using their special terms always in the same way. They must have an empirical basis, that is, their special usages of language must point to some aspect of experience not otherwise catered for. Psychology, for instance, is justified by the fact that it endeavours, by its special method and terminology, to account for that part of human experience not wholly accounted for by anatomy and physiology. A valid sphere of discourse need not give us new information, provided that it can be shown to serve a useful purpose. Astro-navigation, for instance, does not add to our knowledge of astronomy, and even to some extent distorts accepted ideas. But its special terminology and procedures are justified by its practical usefulness. In human affairs matters of fact are often spoken about in special ways for special purposes, such as encouraging ourselves and others to act morally, or patriotically, to endure hardship or support a cause.

Are religious words necessary?

This book is concerned with the Christian religion, and it is as a sphere of discourse that I would like to approach it. We need to examine the language of Christianity, to see what empirical basis it has if any, and also to see whether such language is informative, or useful. Do we in fact need to use the sort of terminology which Christians use in order to make sense of experience?

Obviously, religion has a large number of special words, and special uses for them. With these we are all more or less familiar—sin, faith, grace, resurrection, miracle, the soul, eternal life. We hear this language in church, in chapel, or perhaps in lectures. It seems to fit together in a consistent whole, and we soon get the hang of the attitudes and responses required of us by convention. We confess ourselves to be

miserable sinners, with no health in us. We consent to the suggestion that we have no power to help ourselves: that our one hope lies in the merits of the most precious death and passion of our saviour Jesus Christ. We constantly renew our solemn promise of love and devotion to him. We utter all this unquestionably while we are there: outside we are perhaps willing to go a good deal more than half way to meet its critics. It would cause us the most acute embarrassment to repeat in the bus queue what half an hour before we have said with such matter of fact assurance in the pew.

'Sin' is an obvious case of a word which is very important in religious language. But outside the religious environment even the devout feel that whatever it refers to is better talked about in some other way. To use the word, even in conversation of the serious kind, without a deprecatory smile and a good deal of qualification, is to run the risk of being considered a bigot, or at least out of touch with notable advances in psychology, sociology and educational theory.

In religion, sin is something which we do that God does not like. And by our own most grievous fault. The appropriate question here seems to be, 'How can I find out what God does want?', and then, 'How can I make amends for the past, and see that I do what he wants for the future?' But in another sphere, the 'sin' situation may be referred to as 'maladjustment'. What we did, and also how we feel about what we did, is an abnormality of mental function beyond our control, like hay-fever in the sphere of bodily function. Here the appropriate questions are 'What feature of my environment caused this odd conduct? How can its impact on my mental health be lessened? What drug, or other treatment, will remove my undue concern about what I have done, and make the mental machinery work smoothly for the future?' This is obviously the sphere of abnormal psychology. Some have regarded the function of religion as belonging to this sphere. Religion, of one kind or another, is prescribed as a suitable remedy for some temperaments, as rug-making might be for others. Since a feeling of guilt can be so obsessive that a person is incapacitated, it is claimed by some that sin is therefore not only a

mistaken way of speaking of certain actions, but that it is definitely harmful.

Return for a moment to our unicorn. A friend of mine recently wrote a charming poem about one. As is well known to connoisseurs, unicorns are only docile towards pure women, of whom they are infallible judges. The lady in the story boldly seeks one out. Her lover, who is a knight of the world, afraid of the possible danger and to save embarrassment all round, shoots the beast with his cross-bow as it advances. Gently, the dying unicorn lays its horned head upon the damsel's lap. The story is movingly told, and while we read, we accept the whole picture – the wood in Arcady, lady, knight, unicorn and all. To say 'But unicorns don't exist' is to miss the point. We may say that the poem is poetically 'true'; by reading, or hearing it, we learn something of love and life. This is in fact another widely held opinion about Christianity. The gospel story of the dying and rising God is true only in a poetic way. It is really about us – a dramatisation of our moral struggles and spiritual aspirations. 'Religion,' it has been said, 'is morality tinged with emotion.' An age-old palliative to mental ill, as herbal remedies are an age-old cure for bodily ill, it is also a traditional means of building moral character.

Or consider again the illustration about using the word 'red'. Take this time the word 'good'. Evaluative it obviously is. But it is also descriptive. What is a good knife? One with a sharp cutting edge. What is a good dog? One which is house-trained, obeys its master, and bites intruders. A good man? Someone who is law-abiding, conforming to the standards of conduct demanded by society: and perhaps more also – a man who is kindly, and generous, and not self-seeking. And a good God? By definition, he is the only one of his kind, and we never see him. So we cannot, as we did in the other cases, judge how the word is being used by knowing the subject. Perhaps, then, we judge by what he does? He creates a world of wonder and beauty, for instance. But he also creates a world which contains terror and ugliness, concentration camps and earthquakes. Well, we must concede that we are using the word 'good' in a very odd way here. Indeed, we shall have to work

hard to convince the sceptic that we are justified in using it at all.

Here then are some of the difficulties, and the start of our enquiry. Is the world of religious language like the world of unicorn language? Is the practice of religion like the practice of the herbalist? Old wives once cured fevers, in a hit or miss sort of way, by scraping lichen from the north sides of trees and posts. Now we call it penicillin, knowing how to make it, and precisely when and where to use it. As the old wife is superseded by the science of medicine, is the primitive, hit or miss, mental and emotional treatment of the priest now superseded by the science of psychology, and the practice of psychotherapy? If so, religious language is best translated into other, scientific languages, such as those of psychology, sociology, and anthropology, which can tell us what it 'really means' for modern man. Obviously, too, a language which contains such puzzles as the one about the use of 'good' needs investigating.

I am therefore going to take some of these words of religious usage, examine them to see what they stand for, and what are the right sorts of questions to ask about them, and the right sorts of statements in which to use them. Can we in fact *fully* translate Christian language into other spheres of discourse? Can we take away from the Christian religion all its moral, social and psychological truth and *leave no remainder*?

But before we undertake this, we shall need to know something more of philosophy. To many people, philosophy stands for something both pretentious and obscure. So the meaning of philosophy itself needs some clarification. We shall consider the special interests of the contemporary philosopher, and the challenge which in recent years he has offered to traditional religious discourse.

2

Language, Science and Philosophy

Descriptions and prescriptions

Most people have a reasonably clear idea of what is the subject matter of say, anthropology, or chemistry. They are often less clear as to the subject matter of philosophy. In our own day uncertainty is understandable because philosophers themselves are not entirely agreed as to what their real business is. But until the end of the last century, the tasks of philosophy had been fairly well defined for some hundreds of years. Philosophy means 'love of wisdom'. The systematic pursuit of knowledge for its own sake began among the Greeks, whose word it is. Indeed, for a very long time, philosophy comprised the whole body of human knowledge, including what we now call science. The philosopher originally investigated every field, and had opinions on all subjects. He could in fact claim to know all there was to know. Even as late as the last century, pieces of apparatus used in scientific experiment were known as 'philosophical instruments'. Universities still talk of science as 'natural philosophy', and reward research in scientific subjects with doctorates of philosophy.

But the field of philosophy proper had for long been fairly clearly specified in terms of the sort of questions the philosopher was expected to answer. Broadly speaking, the questions which we can ask about life fall into two categories. First, there are those concerned with the reasons for things in the world around us appearing as they are, and behaving as they do. These can be called 'How?' questions, because they are concerned with how the whole thing works, and they are

generally reducible to a form beginning 'How . . . ?' They are questions of fact, and their answers are descriptive. They are the concern of science. We expect practical, matter of fact answers to them – at least, though the answers these days may be elaborate, and perhaps scarcely matter of fact in the simple sense, we expect them to vindicate themselves by the test of practical application.

The second class of questions is of the sort which asks 'What is it for? In what way is it important? What should I do about it?' These are concerned with values and purposes, and are reducible to forms beginning 'Why?' Answers to them, either explicitly or implicitly, are 'prescriptive'. That is, they attempt to direct our conduct by prescribing what we should do. By telling us that this is better than that, they suggest that we should act in an appropriate way. These 'Why?' questions came to be regarded as the especial province of the philosopher. The philosopher thus becomes involved in the fundamental issues of the nature and purpose of human life. He is of course not necessarily concerned himself with prescribing our conduct. But obviously, when we are thinking about how we should live, we shall take less note of the descriptions available of how the world works, than we shall of opinions put before us about what the world is *for*.

Upon a proper distinction between 'How?' and 'Why?' questions, any real advance in science has depended. But as a matter of fact, the distinction took a very long time to make. Why this was so may be made clear by an example. Imagine a clan chief, at the dawn of history, faced with the problem of consistently bad harvests. He might have asked, 'How is it that the corn in our valley is so much poorer than the corn in the next? Ought we to stay here, or ought we to take better land by force?' His first question is obviously a 'How?' question, and there is a clear practical answer: 'Because steep gradients allow winter rains to erode the soil, whereas the next valley is a well watered alluvial plain on the south side of the mountain.' But his other question is a 'Why?' question, and there might be a variety of answers, in terms of racial destiny, right of conquest, salutary effects of hardships surmounted.

But in fact, our imagined chief would not have asked his questions in any such way. He would have asked, not, 'How came our crops to fail?', but 'What God have we offended?': not 'Shall we attack?', but 'Are the omens favourable for an attack?' Traditional wisdom of a religious and social kind would have so formed his mind as to determine the forms of his questions, and of the answers which would prove acceptable.

Questions of fact waited a long time to be sifted from others, because men asked them in the wrong way, and were too easily satisfied with wrong answers. No one quite started from scratch – all too many ready made answers seem to have been to hand for as far back as we have knowledge. If stars and planets were gods, or under the special control of gods, natural questions were 'Are they for or against us?' 'Do apparent changes in their positions mean good or ill for us?' And the obvious people to ask were priests.

Rationalism and empiricism

The Greeks, in their speculations about the origin and nature of the world, boldly broke out of the circle of ideas imposed by their folklore and mythology. But for all their intellectual brilliance, or perhaps because of it, they started some hares which ran only too well. They believed above all in the power of the human mind. They admired symmetry, simplicity, orderliness, intelligibility. The universe, they felt, must display the same qualities. 'Man,' said Protagoras (born *c.* 500 B.C.), 'is the measure of all things: of things that are, that they are: and of things that are not, that they are not.' So the Greeks sought to find out what the world was like, not by looking at it, but by thinking about it. What *must* be the basis of the world of nature, they asked, if it is simple, coherent, and intelligible?

This is the opposite of the empirical approach, and is called rationalism. (This philosophic use of rationalism should not be confused with the usage of the term in the nineteenth century to indicate materialist and anti-religious attitudes.) The

empiricist, who checks with facts at every step, prefers assurance in a small field to possible error on the grand scale. The rationalist takes what he thinks are the basic ingredients of the world – and constructs a mental model of it in such a way that everything he wants to explain appears in it, operating in the correct way. So if you asked the rationalist philosophers about the movement of the stars, they would reply, 'The circle is the perfect figure. The stars, being themselves perfect beings, must therefore move in circles.'

The difference between the two approaches is important, and may be illustrated thus. Imagine a large clock – one of those which not only tells the time, but also the day, date, and phases of the moon. Two men are confronted with it, and asked to describe its working. One, the empiricist, immediately goes to the clock and peers into the machinery behind the face, sees the system of cogs, levers, and springs, observes their interaction, and produces his drawing with an explanation of what he has observed. The other man, the rationalist, sits down before the clock and says, 'Here we have an apparatus, displaying circular movements at different speeds. What arrangement of interlocking wheels and spindles, and what manner of propulsion, will most economically produce these apparent movements?' So he too makes a drawing. It may be that both men in fact produce an accurate account. If there are errors, the empiricist's will be due to faulty observation of some intricate detail. The rationalist is open to some more fundamental error, for instance as to the means of propulsion. A weight falling at a regular speed would do the job. But in fact it is done by a pendulum.

Christendom became preoccupied with areas of thought which lent themselves readily to the rationalist approach. However true it may be that the fundamental doctrines of the Church were empirical, being an account of Christian experience of God in Christ, the main body of medieval thought was an imposing rationalist construction. The world of nature was explored only as a source of parables and moral lessons; moreover the intelligible perfection of the creation was significant mainly as displaying God's power. Nevertheless, simply because

the world of nature was God's handiwork, it repaid investigation. The more one learned of the universe, the more it inspired one with awe and reverence. So the real origins of experimental science are medieval, and not, as is often popularly supposed, to be found among the joyous innovations of an age of release, regarded as discontinuous with all that went before. In fact scholars of the Middle Ages, becoming acquainted with the notable advances made by Arabian scientists, were aware of the need for an empirical approach, and pioneered where men of the Renaissance were to follow. Roger Bacon, Duns Scotus, and William of Ockham, men of the thirteenth century, were all vitally interested in scientific work. 'We have three means of knowledge,' wrote Bacon, 'Authority, Reasoning, and Experiment. Authority has no value unless its reason be shown; it does not teach, it only calls for assent. In Reasoning we commonly distinguish a sophism from a demonstration by verifying the conclusion through experiment.'

A language for empiricism – 'the mathematical plainness'

Advance in the answering of 'How?' questions demanded that they be limited to the matter in hand, without presuppositions about God or perfect figures. When learning became independent of the Church, and the development of observational techniques showed rationalist assumptions to be false, each field of enquiry was investigated independently of 'philosophy', and indeed of the others. The 'special sciences' followed each its own line, as each, early or late, gained its autonomy; but all shared a common interest in method. They pruned ambiguity and metaphor as far as possible from their language, aiming at complete clarity. One word for one thing – this was the ideal of language to which empiricism readily leant itself. And this produced results. From the sixteenth century onwards, a sphere of discourse of this sort has been gaining ground, and it has been the chief influence in producing the ordinary speech of our age. Its limitations are real: but its advantages have appeared overwhelming.

It is instructive to see this change in language, and in thought, actually going on. Copernicus (1473-1543) we honour as the bold originator of the heliocentric astronomy. But his approach was devout and rationalist. The earth goes round the sun, partly because this fits in with what is observed; but chiefly because this arrangement shows greater simplicity and rationality in the heavens – it redounds even more to the glory of God. And the universe, he says, is spherical 'partly because this form, being a complete whole needing no joints, is the most perfect of all; partly because it constitutes the most spacious form, which is thus best suited to contain and retain all things; and finally because all discrete parts of the world, I mean the Sun, the Moon, and the Planets, appear as spheres'.

Johannes Kepler (1571-1630) is a man of two worlds, doing justice both to theology and to the new data: 'God created the world in accordance with the principles of perfect number, and the mathematical harmonies in the mind of the creator furnish the cause why the number, size, and motions of the orbits are as they are and not otherwise.' But also he says, 'Where matter is, there is geometry.' And for him, observation begins to discredit long accepted notions: 'Formerly I believed that the force which moves planets was really a soul. But when I reflected that this force decreased at a greater distance, I concluded that it must be corporeal.' He begins to realise that within the limits of his studies, 'Nothing can be known completely except quantities, or by quantities'.

Here is the beginning of scientific language, and of preoccupation with the world of matter. Confine yourself to the material, and questions become clear, answers exact. But from confining your attention to the material and observable, it is but a small step to the notion that the material is all that there *is* to be attended to. It is not surprising that 'materialism', from being just a method, became for some a creed. It was the creed, for instance, of Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679). In his famous book *Leviathan*, he writes: 'The universe, that is the whole mass of all things that are, is corporeall, that is to say, Body; and hath the dimensions of magnitude, namely, length,

breadth, and depth: also every part of Body is likewise Body and hath the like dimensions: and consequently every part of the Universe is Body: and that which is not Body is not part of the Universe: and because the Universe is all, that which is no part of it is Nothing; and consequently, Nowhere.'

René Descartes (1596-1650) at about the same time writes what might be a charter for modern science:

'I perceived it to be possible to arrive at a knowledge highly useful in life; and in room of the speculative philosophy usually taught in the schools, to discover a practical, by means of which, knowing the force and action of fire, water, air, the stars, the heavens, and all the other bodies that surround us, as distinctly as we know the various crafts of our artizans, we might also apply them in the same way to all the uses to which they are adapted, and thus render ourselves the lords and possessors of nature.' (*Discourse on Method:* 'the schools' here means the medieval universities.)

To fit a language to these tasks soon became a self-conscious purpose. In 1662 the Royal Society for the Advancement of Science was founded in this country. Two years later it appointed a special Committee for 'improving the English Tongue'. What was meant by this becomes clear in the following extract from Thomas Sprat's *History of the Royal Society,* written in 1667.

'There is one thing about which the Society has been most sollicitous, and that is the manner of their discourse, which, unless they had been very watchful to keep in due temper, the whole spirit and vigour of their design had been so eaten out with the luxury and redundance of speech. . . . This trick of metaphors . . . may be placed amongst those general mischiefs, such as the dissension of Christian princes, the want of practice in religion, and the like, which have been so long spoken against that men are become insensible about them. They (the Society) have exacted from all their members a close, naked, natural way of speaking, positive expressions, clear senses, a native easiness, bringing all things as near the Mathematical Plainness as they can, and preferring the language of

Artisans, Countrymen, and Merchants, before that of Wits and Scholars.'

Philosophy in the modern age

The special sciences having seceded, the 'Why' questions remained the province of philosophy proper. Men continued to ask them with insistence. The age of rocks and the distance of stars is interesting. The qualities of metals and the effects of drugs is both interesting and useful. But the existence of God, the question of an after life, of the freedom of the will, of the possibility of unconditional moral laws – these are of perennial and vital concern. Though we do indeed become 'lords and possessors of nature', we might well be uneasy. Do we hold our estate in fief, rather than by right of conquest? Are there conditions of tenancy? If so, can we know of them? The victorious intellect has gained for us this patrimony; can it win for us the further security of certainty in these great matters?

The sort of philosophy which deals with ultimate questions of purpose and value is called 'metaphysics'. This simply means, in Greek, 'after physics'. Aristotle's lectures in this branch of his philosophy – which he himself called First Philosophy – came to be studied immediately after those of physics. Not unnaturally the name came to be transferred from the lecture course to the subject matter of which it treated. Philosophy since the Renaissance to the late nineteenth century, called sometimes 'modern philosophy' as distinct from 'contemporary philosophy', was much occupied with metaphysics.

In contrast with the specialised fields of each science, metaphysics may range over the whole realm of human experience, and indeed, beyond it. Beyond it, because of the very nature of the questions the philosopher asks himself, or we ask of him. What feature, or features, in life should we make our ultimate concern? What merits our unqualified regard? Is there, somehow beneath all the hurrying multiplicity of life, some feature which is enduring, stable, and which we ignore at our peril? Or is there perhaps something, or even someone,

who makes insistent demands on us? Of course, the demand for some precept in life, or reassurance about its purpose, is not the only grounds for asking philosophical questions. Simple intellectual curiosity, the quest of some overall explanation, is a widespread motive. Are there, we ask, some key features in our experience which, properly understood give intelligibility to all the rest?

If the philosopher's answer to our questions is positive, it is characteristic of the 'unconditioned' which he offers us that it cannot be justified *within* the range of human experience; its claim upon us can only be successfully urged by showing that it has roots, or a point of reference, *beyond* experience. Within the whole range of human experience, values are only 'relative', that is to say, the result of comparison within the system. Smith makes the highest score in the match, relative to the other scores. But is it the highest score ever made? Scanning through and through the score pages of this particular match will not tell us, nor even all the score books of this particular club. For we are not concerned with the relative value of his performance. We are asking about its absolute value. So we must go beyond this particular match, beyond this club – to Wisden, for instance. The highest aspidistra in Wigan *may* be the largest aspidistra in the world. But we could never discover this by staying in Wigan.

Empirical evidence will never underwrite anything as absolute. To claim absoluteness is to make a metaphysical claim. 'Beyond' in the sense used above does not of course necessarily refer to a supernatural sphere inhabited by God, 'the Beyond' of religious convention. It can mean simply beyond the possibility of empirical testing. The metaphysical philosopher chooses some feature as his key feature, and explains the whole in terms of it. Hobbes, for instance, chose 'body', or matter, as we saw. There is here no question of a balance of evidence. It is a question of personal option. The metaphysical philosopher can hope to gain support for his option by showing the extent and cogency of the explanation of the rest of experience that it affords. He may even hope that he can induce others to share the sort of experience which prompted his original

choice of view point. But it remains a personal insight; and not even the greatest of metaphysicians have been able to silence objectors or command universal assent.

Revolution in philosophy

Philosophy started in the market places of the cities of ancient Greece, with ordinary intelligent men asking deep questions, and furnishing what answers they could, in everyday language. But through succeeding centuries of barbarism and illiteracy, discourse of this kind moved from the public square to the study, and with the spread of Christianity, to the cloister. Before, and after, the Renaissance there were great intellectual achievements in this field, some of lasting value. But issues discussed became increasingly technical, and philosophers, especially of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, indulged in such obscurity of language, that they communicated little to the ordinary man. Moreover, what *was* intelligible seemed notoriously at odds with common sense, and with the view of the world which the scientist was sponsoring. Almost down to our own day, philosophers could only communicate with other philosophers, and then on matters apparently so far removed from ordinary experience, that they seemed irrelevant to life as it has to be lived. But during the present century, there has been a significant change. If philosophy has not been brought into the supermarket, it has at least been brought once more within the range of ordinary thinking men.

It was the notable success of scientific method which led men to take a new look at philosophy. Questions about the orbits of planets, the growth of plants, the structure of matter, had been clearly formulated, and apparently precisely answered. The answers were vindicated by the success of their application. The scientist had narrowed his field, clearly specified what he was looking for, and found it. An impressive body of agreed knowledge was the result. What, it was pertinently asked, could philosophers point to as their achievement during this time? Precious little, it appeared. No general agreement, no generally accepted and intelligible language. Philosophers

might well be compared to their first predecessors, among the fallen angels in hell, as Milton describes them:

> Others apart sat on a hill retir'd,
> In thoughts more elevate, and reason'd high
> Of Providence, foreknowledge, will and fate,
> Fix'd fate, free will, foreknowledge absolute,
> And found no end, in wandering mazes lost . . .
> (*Paradise Lost*, II, 557f.)

Perhaps if the philosopher set his sights a little lower, he might achieve more. A test of useful language is whether it can talk about things people can recognise, in a way they can understand. If the philosopher could not speak with the simple clarity of the scientist, he had nothing to say. He could be dispensed with; at least, if he were of the traditional rationalist and metaphysical sort he could, for he had nothing to offer to twentieth-century man.

Out of these criticisms, an entirely new approach to philosophy was born. The philosopher's sights were indeed lowered. Not surprisingly, the men who led this revolution were empiricists, and logicians. The movement was at first called Logical Positivism, and later, Logical Empiricism. There have been various developments: but the best general descriptive name is perhaps the philosophy of linguistic analysis. In 1921, Ludwig Wittgenstein published (in German) a book called *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, which is usually regarded as its foundation. But at about the same time, Moritz Schlick was appointed as professor of philosophy at the University of Vienna, and around him gathered a most influential group calling itself the Vienna Circle. Schlick was murdered by an unbalanced student in 1936, and before the second German War, the group had been scattered by Hitlerism. Wittgenstein influenced the Circle without actually being a member of it; in fact he came to England, and lectured in Cambridge. In this country, the best known sponsor of the new philosophy is Professor A. J. Ayer, whose *Language, Truth, and Logic* caused a considerable stir when it was published in 1936.

Philosophy's new task

If an agreed body of knowledge was a possible end product of philosophising, what *sort* of knowledge would this be? What sorts of questions should the philosopher apply himself to? What area of enquiry would suggest questions which could be clearly formulated, and as clearly answered? It was demanded that philosophy should in some sense be empirical: but obviously every area of empirical enquiry had already, and quite properly, been divided up among the various branches of science. Even the realm of 'mental facts', to which the philosopher had clung longest, was now recognised as the field of the new science of psychology.

The first conclusion was that philosophy could not be an empirical study: not in the sense, at least, that it could claim to give information about any area of facts. Indeed, traditional philosophy had been unproductive because it had tried to give information about facts. All of the observable universe had been turned over to the sciences; and the philosopher had then attempted to give information about 'metaphysical' objects. But metaphysical realities 'behind', or 'beyond', the observable world, could not be realities in the ordinary sense. They were subjective, and conjectural. What could not be observed could not sponsor an appropriate empirical language. How can you have agreed knowledge, and acceptable conventions of language, about 'objects' concerning which the main question at issue is whether they are there at all?

What then *is* philosophy's business? The answer given, and widely accepted, was that language itself was philosophy's business. Its prime concern was the analysis of the way in which language does its job of expressing meaning. It was in fact its task to discover what we mean by meaning. What sort of criteria, for instance, will determine the sort of meaning statements have, or whether they have any real meaning at all? Obviously even at an elementary level, the subject bristles with intriguing problems. You can have two simple sentences, identical as far as grammar goes, for instance, but apparently poles

apart when it comes to deciding how we are to take them. 'I was born under Southend Pier' – a clear statement of fact of an understandable kind; possible to check, too, though remoteness in time and reticence of witnesses might make it difficult. 'I was born under Sagittarius' – a statement of fact? Well, of a kind. Not to be checked in the navigation tables – rather, Old Moore. But what sort of meaning is here? None, if the first statement is our standard sort of example. If there is any useful meaning, it involves a whole backlog of considerations of the pseudo-science of astrology, and my gullibility. You can at least identify the special 'sphere of discourse' to which it belongs. But we do more than this – by calling astrology a pseudo-science, we are clearly implying an assessment of the sorts of meaning which you can convey in this sphere, by comparison, say with astronomy proper. Put in a slightly different way, 'What the stars foretell' and 'What the astronomers foretell' are generally agreed to be poles apart in respect of the meaning value of 'foretell' in the two similar grammatical uses.

It might appear at first that, by this sort of critique, the philosopher's task becomes something very humdrum. Clarification, which I mentioned earlier as part of his business, seems to become the whole of it. He becomes a sorting clerk, sorting out questions and answers and statements, redirecting some, discarding others as insufficiently addressed, answering enquiries about 'spheres of discourse', and so on. In fact, it has proved far from humdrum. For instance, the criterion of meaning adopted at first was extremely rigorous. Statements can only have meaning for us when they can be verified in sense perception, and when we can have a reasonable idea of what tests would be appropriate. We will consider more fully later the nature and justification of such a criterion. But we can see at once that it drives a coach and horses through a tremendous amount of discourse which we have been accustomed to regard with high seriousness. It has certainly, as Russell said, 'cleared a lot of lumber'.

For instance, we ask questions successfully in limited fields, and get satisfactory answers. 'How did that tree come to be

there?' we may ask, and get an answer from the biologist in terms of the adaptability of conifers to certain conditions of soil and altitude. Or we ask 'How did that tor come to be there?' and the geologist explains in terms of the solubility of granite in certain acids present in surface drainage – or in whatever terms are fashionable at the moment. But in both cases we know the *sort* of answer which will satisfy us; we know that if we cared to we could follow through all the steps by which the scientist has determined his answers. We are fitting a few more pieces into our jigsaw puzzle of knowledge. Reflecting then upon the wonders of nature, we are tempted to ask a portmanteau question, that seems to sum up all the rest – 'How did the universe come to be there?' How can this be answered in terms of environment, as the others were? By definition, the universe has no environment – it is all that there is. Say the answer is in terms of a being or force somehow 'beyond' the universe. Something beyond experience, we are told. But how do we know about it? By things which happen *within* the universe, apparently. But the 'something beyond' is a matter of conjecture; some would deny its existence; the things within the universe would still be there. How can we conceive of any test which would be appropriate? Moreover (laying aside any religious or preconceived metaphysical conceptions), is there any answer which by the nature of the case we would see to be appropriate, tying in with what we already know? No. The trouble, in fact, is with our question. It seemed to be a reasonable one, because grammatically it was exactly like the others. But it is in fact, as we say, logically vacuous. It is not just asking a difficult question; by the canons of the analytical philosopher, it is *meaningless*. The criterion of meaning is testing by the senses. Here there can be no tests. No tests, no meaning. The difference between the first two, and the third questions, is the difference between asking 'Where do these jigsaw pieces fit in?' and 'Where does the whole jigsaw fit in?'

Implications for Christian thought

It will have occurred to the reader that the new philosophy of analysis represents a grave challenge, not only to metaphysical language, but to theological language as well. The attack – and it is an attack, partly because of the nature of the new philosophical rules, and partly because those who operate them have in fact been temperamentally as well as professionally unsympathetic to Christianity – has not been on the grounds of the plausibility of this or that conception or doctrine, but on the very possibility of religious language. Metaphysical, and with it religious language, is rejected quite bluntly as meaningless. Even after some later modification of its earlier axioms, the new philosophy presents a serious challenge to theology. For instance, if our questions are answered somehow in terms of a God who is 'out there', or even in the 'depth', there is no going 'out there', or 'down there' to test them. Such answers have no conceivable empirical test, and so have no meaning. They are, in the best sense of the word, nonsense. The contemporary philosopher is inclined to say that the only meaning which statements involving God can have is indicated by the tests of the anthropologist – tests in answer to the enquiry, 'How did people come to talk about God in this way?' or by the tests of the psychologist – 'How do people come to need to entertain the idea of God?'

The issue before theologians is not, whether this or that traditional way of talking about God is appropriate today. It is whether we can legitimately talk about God at all. Many able minds are engaged on both sides, and only extremists would claim problems have been solved to the advantage of either. We cannot talk religious language without reckoning with the challenge, at however elementary a level. But for all its gravity, the analytical philosophy has clarified many issues, and invigorated theological as well as philosophical thought. The upshot for us is that Christians who want to talk about their religion in a way acceptable to educated people have to sustain their claim to know what they are talking about. They have to prepare themselves to show that their language is

meaningful; and that what they are talking about is 'real' in the way Christians have always understood it to be, and not in the way that some non-Christians are prepared to explain it to them.

3
Problems of Religious Language

It will be obvious to the reader that the sort of approach to the Christian religion suggested in Chapter 1 is determined by linguistic philosophy. We have to show that its language is somehow anchored in ordinary experience – is in fact basically empirical – and also that the odd extensions of such everyday uses are legitimate and meaningful. Before we consider some topics of Christian discourse, we must look a little more closely at the sceptical critic's case. First, he distinguishes two kinds of statement – a distinction so widely accepted as to be commonplace. We saw that we could not determine the precise meaning of the adjective 'red' until we saw it in use. This is why the analytical philosopher takes not individual words, but statements, as units of meaning.

Analytical statements

Even if you have never been in East Anglia, you will accept the statement, 'A quant is a punting pole which will not sink in mud', because I have simply offered you a definition. The statement points to a linguistic convention among East Coast boatmen, just as 'A spade is a digging instrument, with a steel blade and a long wooden handle' tells you of another convention in gardening circles. The latter does no more than call a spade a spade. This, in logicians' circles, is called 'tautology' (from Greek *to auto* = the same thing), which means saying the same thing in different words.

These statements which are tautologies are also called

'analytical' statements. The examples given are of the simplest kind, which simply give equivalents of a word sign in other word signs. A more complex example would be 'Either some people in the room like bananas, or none do'. We see at once that this is true, because it covers all possible cases – in fact it *must* be true. (If all like them, the first alternative is true, because any selected group of the total will like them, and of these it may be truly said that 'Some like them'.) It is impossible that there should both be some who say 'yes' when we ask about their tastes, and at the same time none who say 'yes'. We do not have to go round asking to make that clear. We are not being told anything factual about the people in the room. We are being told simply how the signs 'some' and 'none' must function if they are used together. Bananas do not enter into the matter. They are simply being used as pegs, on which to hang the statement of a rule about using language. For all statements of the same *form* are necessarily true, whatever particular pegs are used – 'Either some dogs are black, or none are', 'Either some men have red hair, or none have'. What is being stated is not a matter of fact, but a principle governing the way words can be combined. The study of such principles is part of the subject matter of Logic. We are reminded of another sort of statement, where the particular 'pegs' are a matter of indifference – I mean the analytical statements, or equations, of algebra. '$a^2 - b^2 = (a + b)(a - b)$', we may say, adding, or at least assuming, 'for all values of a and b'. Modern symbolic logic uses an algebraic symbolism of its own, and this affords a relatively straight forward way of determining what the principles are that govern the proper relationship of statements to one another, and whether in particular instances they are being observed. Its concern is in fact with the principles of valid argument, and their application.

Analytical statements, or tautologies, have the advantage, like mathematical equations, of being open to proof. But they have the disadvantage of being uninformative about any matter of fact in the world.

Synthetic statements

'The spade is in the garden shed.' This states a matter of fact, namely that if you go and look in the garden shed, you will see a spade. 'Some people here like bananas.' This tells you that there is at least one person present, who, when asked 'Do you like bananas?' will answer 'Yes'. These statements are of a sort which is informative about a matter of fact, or state of affairs in the world, and they are called 'synthetic'. They rest on evidence, and the evidence is of the 'public' kind which can be gathered by the use of the senses. If you ask of a statement of fact, 'What does this mean?' I answer that it states briefly certain sense experiences which I have had, and which you can have too if you take the trouble. In this case, the experiences are obvious, and may be put into words as 'I am going down the garden. I stop and look in the shed. I see the spade there.' Or, 'I ask Smith if he likes bananas. I hear him reply yes.' These reports establish the meaning of my original statements, indicating to you the ways in which you can verify it.

So, asked what is the meaning of a synthetic statement, the analytical philosopher replies that 'The meaning of a statement is the method of its verification'. The means of verification may not be so immediately obvious as they were in the simple examples above. If I say, 'The unicorn is white', you may be uncertain what I am meaning – is it zoological, or mythological? When you say 'Show me', and, accordingly, we get on a bus, my meaning begins to narrow for you when you see that we are headed for Russell Square, and not for Regent's Park. So the empirical statements which give meaning to 'The unicorn is white' are, 'We take a bus to Russell Square. We enter Room XVI of the British Museum. We look at a medieval bestiary . . .' and so on.

Note that the test is always by means of direct experience of the senses. Statements of fact must, say the verificationists, qualify as such by being verifiable in sense perception. Some sentences fail the test, although they have the grammatical *form* of informative statements. 'A pobble', says Edward Lear,

'is better without his toes.' This appears to be a statement of fact. But Lear fails to indicate the natural habitat of pobbles. We shall never be able to collect relevant information about pobbles, or even recognise one, with or without toes. Not, after all, a statement of fact.

Of course, some statements of scientific fact are not conclusively verifiable – for instance, statements about the properties of chemical substances, which are based on random samples, and could not be conclusive until *all* examples in the world had been examined. Moreover, statements about facts of history could only be verified by an impossible procedure – that of going back in time to witness them. So a 'weak' sense of the principle of verification was admitted, by which meaning was conferred by sense experience which would render a statement *probable*, rather than certain.

Verification and religious statements

The effect of this critique of meaning has already been suggested in the previous chapter. Statements about God fail the verificationist's test of meaningfulness. They have no meaning, because God cannot be the object of sense experience. There are no groups of empirical statements which will verify the statement 'God is in his heaven', as there were statements which would verify 'The Spade is in the garden shed'.

The believer may counter by saying that there *are* a great number of such statements. 'God exists', for instance, entails all the statements which describe the orderliness of the world of nature, the regularity of the seasons, and the balance of forces which makes life possible. But, replies the critic, surely statements about the orderliness of the world simply give meaning to the statement 'The whole world is orderly'. This expresses a good deal less than the believer wants to claim for the statement 'God exists'. As A. J. Ayer says: 'If the statement "God exists" entails no more than that certain types of phenomena occur in certain sequences, then to assert the existence of a god will be simply equivalent to asserting that there is the requisite regularity in nature; and no religious man

would admit that this was all he intended to assert in asserting the existence of a god.' (*Language, Truth and Logic*, 2nd edition, p. 115.)

The appeal to 'religious experience' fares no better with the sceptic. The believer says that the 'inner life' of the devout involves direct encounter with an objective supernatural being. He claims that descriptions of religious experience provide the necessary verifying statements of the objectivity of this being. But, says the critic, we are here simply concerned with mental states. In this case they are characterised by a feeling-tone of certitude of an encounter, sometimes even by an image, visual or auditory, of what is supposed to be encountered. But the only verifiable things about mental states are that certain recognisable psychological phenomena have occurred in a human mind. A mental state may appear to be 'about' some exterior object; it may be charged with a feeling of certitude that the object is real. But the object is certainly not *part* of the mental state, and no examination of the mental state will produce anything beyond itself. Certitude does not involve certainty. Certitude describes a mental feeling: certainty is of a state of affairs external to the mind, only to be accredited where the normal and public verificational procedures have been correctly employed. And this, in respect of a 'supernatural being', we have already seen to be impossible.

For example, there is a mental state which can be described as 'encountering a cow'. I may claim, with full certitude, to have experienced it whilst walking home in the dusk. There is no doubt I have had the experience. But was there, you may ask, really a cow? If the point at issue is whether there is a cow in the lane, or only an oddly shaped bush, you will never satisfy yourself on this point by getting me to describe minutely my 'cow-encountering' experience. You will have to go down the lane on your own account and look. Neither, it is claimed, can the 'God-encountering' experience deliver more than the certainty that the experience took place. But when the point at issue is whether there was a God or only an illusion, there is no going anywhere to look.

'God exists' is neither an inference, nor an hypothesis

May we not, however, claim that the statement 'God exists' is a reasonable *inference* from the orderliness of the world? Robinson Crusoe rightly inferred the presence of a man on his island from the footprint in the sand; we rightly infer that rain is imminent from the appearance of stratus cloud. But the cases are quite dissimilar, says the critic. Legitimate inference always depends on past experience of a connection between what is inferred and what we infer from. Crusoe had past experience of the connection between human feet and footprints; we recognise the invariable connection between stratus cloud and the approach of a warm front. But there is no previous experience of the relation of a god to a universe, such that we can claim that 'God exists' is a reasonable inference.

We may reply that legitimate inference from the seen to the unseen is far from uncommon. For instance, from the Greek *kuklos*, the English *wheel*, and the Russian *koleso*, there is inferred the existence in a primeval Indo-European language of a word *kwelos*, with a reduplicated form *kwekwlos*. This language is attributed to the later Stone Age. It is, of course, long since lost; but its grammar, syntax, and vocabulary have been built up by little and little, by inference from existing languages. The argument is from the seen to the unseen, and the conclusion of the argument commands the universal assent of philologists.

Now proto-Indo-European is certainly 'unseen'. But it is not unseeable. It is not impossible, even if highly unlikely, that one day archaeologists may unearth inscriptions in this language from which the speech of more than half the modern inhabitants of the world is reckoned to be descended. Its existence will thereby be confirmed. But God is by definition unseeable. To confirm the existence of God by similar means is *logically* impossible. Moreover, the claim that *kwelos* is a common source word for its Greek, English, and Russian derivatives, is not an unsupported inference. The theoretical language has been built up by the application of rules about

word changes and derivations worked out by philologists from known languages. So it draws together a whole mass of evidence about kindred and diverse forms and usages, and offers the best explanation so far advanced of how a large group of modern languages came to be as they are. It is in fact a scientific *hypothesis*.

Well, why cannot 'God exists' be an hypothesis? Does it not draw together a whole mass of evidence about the whole universe, and man's experience in it, by the application of rules worked out by theologians? May we not see it as on the same footing as the statement 'Pluto exists', if the latter were made before 1930? That is, all the evidence of observation of the movements of the planets pointed to the hypothesis that there must be another, though unseen, body, of a certain mass and in a certain orbit. Then, in 1930, the planet Pluto was observed, and 'Pluto exists' was no longer a hypothesis, but a discovered fact. So we may say that 'God exists' is an hypothesis, but that we shall not until after this life be in a position to make the observation that will establish the fact.

Since usually the possibility of a future life is thought to be bound up with the existence of God, this argument seems rather like trying to open a bank account by the deposit of a cheque drawn upon it. But in any case it may properly be objected that here the word hypothesis is being used in a rather odd way. The point of an hypothesis in science is that it must offer the possibility of vindication in this life. One of the ways in which a scientific hypothesis can achieve a respectable status is by showing its reliability in predicting what will happen. The Pluto hypothesis enabled astronomers not only to explain past movements of the planets, but also to predict future movements. What can be predicted about future happenings by means of the hypothesis 'God exists'? Moreover, an hypothesis must show itself to be continuous with, and an extension to new material, of some existing explanatory theory. The Pluto hypothesis, for instance, reduced to order some observed anomalies of planetary motion by seeing them in terms of the theory of gravitation. An explanation which does not fit in with already received knowledge is not really

an explanation at all. For instance, to answer the question, 'Why do things burn?' by replying 'Because they contain a combustible element called phlogiston', is not really offering an explanation at all – it is merely giving a high sounding name to our ignorance. Explanation only appeared in this issue, when the common features of all situations of combustion could be pointed to in a general theory involving chemical change and the presence of oxygen. To answer the question, 'Why is the universe orderly?' by replying 'Because God made it so', is not to offer an explanation which can be fitted in to other received knowledge, of the same order. It seems to be an answer more akin to phlogiston talk than Pluto talk. In fact, the claim of 'God exists' to be an hypothesis fails both these tests, being neither a means of prediction nor an extension of accepted principles.

Further, people who assert that God exists make other assertions about him, for instance that he loves men. Now, the scientist (ideally, if not always in fact) will modify his hypothesis in the face of conflicting evidence. But in making his assertions, the religious man's attitude to evidence is rather curious. Instead of modifying his belief in the face of conflicting evidence, he seems to regard it as a virtue not to do so. Evidence against God's benevolence, for instance, which it is not difficult to find, is regarded as a test of faith. A believer is a man who will not allow anything to count against his belief. This brings us to the last of these objections to theological language which we shall consider. It is perhaps the gravest of all. It is a variant of the verification principle, and is known as the principle of falsification.

Falsification and religious statements

Whenever I make a statement of fact, I imply that statements inconsistent with it are false. When I say 'The spade is in the garden shed', I am saying at the same time, 'It is not the case that the spade is not in the garden shed'. So, if you know what a statement denies, you are getting towards knowing what it asserts. I make clear to you what I am claiming, by making

clear what evidence counts either for or against it. In fact, for every statement of fact, there *must* be some other statement or statements which count against it. In asserting that a state of affairs exist ('The spade is in the shed'), I deny that another state of affairs exists ('The spade is on the verandah'). I allow that should the latter state of affairs be established on the evidence, my original claim must be false. In other words, I admit that my statement can be 'falsified'. Moreover, if it cannot be falsified, it cannot be a statement of fact.

How does the claim of religious statements to be questions of fact face up to this principle of falsifications? The issue was debated in 1950 and 1951 in Oxford, and important contributions to the debate are reprinted in the book *New Essays in Philosophical Theology*, edited by Professor A. G. N. Flew and Alasdair MacIntyre. Flew's own contribution to the discussion included his parable of the invisible gardener, which makes very clear the implications of the principle.

'Once upon a time, two explorers came upon a clearing in the jungle. In the clearing were growing many flowers and many weeds. One explorer says, "Some gardener must tend this plot." The other disagrees, "There is no gardener." So they pitch their tents and set a watch. No gardener is ever seen. "But perhaps he is an invisible gardener." So they set up a barbed wire fence. They electrify it. They patrol with bloodhounds. (For they remember how H. G. Wells's Invisible Man could be smelt and touched though he could not be seen.) But no shrieks ever suggest that some intruder has received a shock. No movements of the wire betray an invisible climber. The bloodhounds never give cry. But still the Believer is not convinced. "But there is a gardener, invisible, intangible, insensible to electric shocks, a gardener who has no scent and makes no sound, a gardener who comes secretly to look after the garden which he loves." At last the Sceptic despairs, "But what remains of your original assertion? Just how does what you call an invisible, intangible, eternally elusive gardener differ from an imaginary gardener, or even from no gardener at all?"'

A statement which is consistent with any and every state of affairs is not a statement of fact. If it is claimed that 'God exists' is a statement of fact to which evidence points, what is the state of affairs which, if proved to be the case, would show it to be false? How is 'God exists' to be falsified? What happens when a disbeliever tries to bring evidence against it? 'What about innocent suffering? What about natural disasters? What about Hiroshima? What of the ferocity of the animal kingdom?' To each of these questions the believer offers some sort of answer: for instance, that evil results from man's misuse of his will, and must share in its effects; that suffering is not wholly bad, because it is a means of developing character, and also an occasion for compassion and mutual help. In fact all the evidence which might count against the existence of God is admitted, but explained away. The believer will not allow anything to count against his belief, and regards this attitude as meritorious. So the statement 'God exists' is not falsifiable for him. Therefore, says the sceptic, it is not a statement of fact. What started apparently as a statement of fact is, by the process of 'explaining away' objections, 'killed by inches, the death by a thousand qualifications'.

These objections to religious discourse seem indeed to be formidable. Some have claimed that by them both metaphysics and theology have been eliminated as significant fields of study. 'Metaphysical' became a contemptuous label for what was reckoned as the pretentious, but vacuous, language of the traditional metaphysician and theologian. I have already suggested that a mask of cool analytical appraisal in some cases covers a distinct anti-religious animus. To claim, for instance, that the language in which the Christian gospel has been proclaimed and transmitted is meaningless, may seem disingenuous. But we are concerned not with motives but with arguments. The verificationist and the analytical philosopher must be met on their own ground. The Christian philosopher has not stood idly by, but has vigorously taken up the challenge. In this country, I. N. Crombie, R. M. Hare, A. MacIntyre, E. L. Mascall, B. Mitchell and I. T. Ramsey are

the leading thinkers who have made notable contributions to a debate which continues. Within the limits of this work it is not possible to follow every move that has been made in the varied attempts to rehabilitate metaphysics and to justify religious language. In the rest of this chapter I shall give some account of general lines of defence and counterattack which have met with some success.

Is there a defence against the 'falsification principle'?

We will take the last problem first, that of falsification. Must we admit that religious statements have no factual meaning, because they are not falsifiable? We can of course say that they *are* falsifiable, like any other statement of fact. For instance, 'Christ gives us the means of living an abundant life' can be verified and falsified by living according to Christian principles. A life of joy and peace provides the verification; absence of these qualities of life would provide falsification. But what Christian would admit the statement false, if the experiment failed? Would we not at once reply that evident lack of the promised experiences merely indicates that the principles have not been fully lived up to? The sceptic would then ask us for a criterion by which he could judge the minimum extent of living up to the principles which would justify him in regarding any particular case as a crucial experiment. And we would reply, with the confidence of scriptural backing, that it is not for us to judge. This line of argument has for these reasons had few influential backers.

What alternatives are open? We can accept the fact that religious statements are not assertions at all. Or we can adopt a middle course, and say that they are assertions of an informative kind, but that they are falsifiable only in principle, and not in practice. In working out these alternatives we shall come to see that the Christian apologist can show that there are grounds for questioning the validity of the principle of falsification as a criterion of meaningfulness. But accepting for the moment the basic contention of the verificationist, namely that the meaning of an assertion must always lie in statements

of sense-perception relevant to its verification or falsification, let us examine some unfalsifiable assertions outside of the religious field.

Say a man asserts that 'all capitalists are wicked'. Such a person will not allow any evidence to count against his belief. Show him a generous capitalist, and he says that the generosity is but a sprat to catch a mackerel. Show him a kindly one, and he says that the apparent kindliness is either hypocrisy, or crafty policy. So 'all capitalists are wicked' is not falsifiable for him. Being unfalsifiable, it asserts nothing. But although it is uninformative about capitalists, it is not meaningless. For the man who asserts it, it is obviously significant. And we have to reckon with it. It provides us with a clue as to how the man will act politically. It cannot be without interest to capitalists themselves – if they come to hear that there are people around who think them consistently wicked, in certain situations their own conduct may be affected.

An assertion which, though factually uninformative, furnishes a clue to the conduct not only of the man who makes it but also of others is not without significance. Such an assertion deflects our attention from the question whether it has factual meaning, to the question of the *function* it performs. The function of this one is obviously to characterise a particular viewpoint in the politico-economic sphere. Though the expression of a viewpoint is not itself factual, in opting for this one, the man is determining how facts are going to be evaluated by him, as he comes to observe them. Another option in the same sphere might be 'capitalists are the supreme example of human industry, initiative, and resource'. It is not without importance which of these options we embrace. We may go further, and say that we cannot organise our experience at all unless we adopt some viewpoint; for instance that our senses give us a more or less accurate representation of events in the world; or that natural events will continue to occur with the same orderliness and regularity as they have in the past. Ought we not to extend the definition of meaning to cover expressions of such 'viewpoints'?

Consider now my unfalsifiable statement 'Charlie is a good

chap at heart'. Charlie is an old comrade, whose quality was proved to me in a long period of intimate association, under the most difficult circumstances. His subsequent scandalous behaviour and frequent lapses, and the slighting remarks of my other friends, do not change my opinion. When once more he is in trouble I say, 'Poor old Charlie, he's done it again,' or 'If only they knew him as I do . . .'. The basis of my assertion is historical, it records what I once knew Charlie to be. It records, moreover, a personal situation in which we were both involved, and in it, if nowhere else, Charlie's part was a noble one. My claim does not depend on this or that piece of behaviour: it is not an hypothesis about Charlie, to be modified next time he appears before the bench. It is a statement about my unique personal relationship with him. However appearances go against Charlie, I have faith in him. Moreover, my faith in him is not 'blind faith'. I am not maintaining that philandering, or embezzling can be part of what being 'good at heart' means, in Charlie's special case. I am not refusing to accept the plain evidence of his outrageous conduct. I am not discounting it. It worries me. I go on believing in Charlie *in spite of* what he does. In other words, all this evidence does count against my assertion. But it does not count decisively. I might add that the only situation in which it could count decisively is the purely theoretical one in which, after Charlie is dead, an absolutely exhaustive account is compiled of all his personal activities and relationships, and from this a profit and loss account drawn up.

Similarly, the Christian is not saying that the fact of innocent suffering is part of the special meaning of 'good' as applied to God. He is not discounting the fact of evil or of suffering. He is anxiously concerned about it. In spite of disaster and wickedness, he maintains his belief, because it expresses a unique personal relationship with Christ. Suffering counts against this belief, but it does not count decisively. And unlike my special relationship with Charlie, which terminated when we were demobilised, as a Christian I feel that my relationship with Christ is constantly renewed and strengthened in prayer and through the sacraments. I may,

however, not claim to have known this relationship myself. I may still make theological assertions such as 'God exists', or 'God loves all men', on the basis of my certainty that at least some men have had this experience. It has been commended to me in such a way that I am confident that I am right to aspire to it. This line of argument claims that theological assertions are informative, and that they both describe a personal relationship with the divine, and also commend this relationship to others.

'Does anything', asks Ian Crombie, 'count against the assertion that God is merciful? Yes, suffering. Does anything count decisively against it? No, we reply, because it is true. Could anything count decisively against it? Yes, suffering which was utterly, eternally and irredeemably pointless. Can we then design a crucial experiment? No, because we can never see all of the picture.' (A. G. N. Flew and A. McIntyre *New Essays,* p. 124.) This latter phrase may be taken to mean, 'never in this life can we see all of the picture', with the implication that we may be able to do so in a future life. If there is, as Christians believe, a continuation of personal identity and experience beyond death, part of that experience will presumably be the verification of our present religious utterances. If there is no future life, there will be no falsification of them, because there will be no experience in which they are to be falsified. (John Hick, who develops this argument of future verification, points out that it is possible for an assertion to be in principle verifiable, but not in principle falsifiable. For instance, the assertion that 'there are three successive sevens in the decimal determination of π'. So far they have not been found, but if they are, the assertion is verified; it can never be falsified, because the operation can go on for ever. (*Philosophy of Religion,* p. 100f.)

Limitations of the 'principle of verification'

Return for a moment to my statement about Charlie. The critic's reply to this may already have occurred to the reader. 'If you are really asserting anything about Charlie, you must

be able to indicate the supporting statements of sense perceptions which verify it – statements about what he once did, which will offset what he does now. Otherwise you are simply describing your own attitude (which in the circumstances seems rather perverse). All you are saying is "Good old Charlie".'

The sceptic is victorious – on the ground which he has himself marked out. This ground sees acceptable evidence in terms of sense perception only, of the public and communicable sort. I am demanding the admission of evidence of a different sort. It is that of an experienced personal relationship. I am making what to the sceptic will appear to be a very dubious claim, namely that there is a criterion which distinguishes between 'Good old Charlie' and 'Charlie is a good chap at heart', and that I know it, through knowing Charlie. If the sceptic brushes this aside, I reply, 'You have adopted a point of view which excludes evidence from personal relationships unless it can be produced in verifiable statements of sense perception. I have adopted a point of view which sees in personal relationships the key feature in understanding human experience. Moreover, such relationship cannot be expressed in statements of the kind you want, because each is a unique event, and ordinary statements can never *exhaustively* describe the unique.'

Here I have suggested that the verificationist is simply adopting one point of view, and I another; and that both are on an equal footing. To see what justification I have for saying this, let us examine the verification principle itself. 'The meaning of any statement which is not analytical is to be found in equivalent statements referring to actual or possible sense experiences.' Now, what sort of assertion is this statement of the principle itself? It is, of course, either analytical or synthetic. If it is analytical, it makes no statement of fact, but merely offers a definition – that is, it records a convention about how the verificationist intends to use the word 'meaning'. If this is all the principle does, then anyone is free to adopt any other convention for the meaning of 'meaning'. But obviously it is precisely this freedom that the verifica-

tionist wants to limit. The assertion of the principle must therefore be a synthetic statement. So we are entitled to ask, 'What equivalent statements referring to actual or possible sense experiences will verify or falsify it?' There are none. We cannot even identify the sorts of assertions that will do the job until we have assumed the principle. So, by its own standards, the assertion of the principle has no meaning.

The verification principle is not itself empirical, then. It is an assumption made before the actual uses of language are explored. It is a prior judgment of the relative value of different kinds of talk. It is itself a metaphysical statement. As representing a choice of viewpoint, the assertion, 'All statements not verifiable in sense perception are meaningless' functions very much like the assertion, 'All capitalists are wicked'. The verificationist will reply that the cases are not parallel – the first assertion has very considerable usefulness, whilst the second has practically no use. But this is to introduce a very different criterion of meaning, that of usefulness, rather than verifiabiltiy.

The verificationist's use of the word 'fact' is also instructive. A fact, he claims, is a state of affairs to which attention can be drawn by a statement verifiable by sense perception. It is obvious that facts of the kind expressed in the language of science are taken as the model. The scientific sphere of discourse, the verificationist is saying, is basic, and empirical facts of this sort are the only significant ones. Now, in ordinary talk we use the word 'fact' much more widely. There are facts of the analytical kind – in logic or mathematics. But we also use the word of assertions which are not the product of scientific method, but of 'connoisseurship' – in spheres such as those of politics, sociology, morals, or the arts. It cannot be simply assumed that 'fact' is only correctly applied to the deliveries of a sense experience situation. It has to be proved. The verificationist does not prove it. It is doubtful if he could. Even in sense perception 'facts' are not presented directly to the mind; rather, the mind organises bare sensation into recognisable patterns, which will fit in with patterns already accepted. What are deemed facts are the patterns

which will fit into the overall pattern, the generally accepted 'world picture' of the modern man, which in our age is largely the product of our science. In another age it might have been a metaphysical, or religious 'world picture'. What were then facts are now no longer such; nor are the present facts necessarily going to retain that status.

The verificationist depends a good deal on the emotional overtones of the appeal to 'scientific fact' or 'verifiable fact', and these overtones are in the contemporary climate of opinion powerfully persuasive. He has not shown that religious language is meaningless; he assumes a definition of meaning which excludes religious language from the start.

Criteria of valid spheres of discourse

The verification principle is, then, too rigorous and narrow in its criterion of meaning; there has been a reaction against it by many analytical philosophers, who adopt a more empirical approach to language, and a more flexible definition of meaning. Meaning is to be found in the way language is used. The way to find out the meaning of assertions is to study their use in their own characteristic context. This procedure first identifies and then evaluates different spheres of discourse. Interest is now shifted from seeing how a particular use of language measures up to a prior criterion of meaning and relevance to seeing what it attempts to do, how it attempts to do it, and how far it is successful. To a much greater extent we allow a sphere of discourse to speak for itself. We listen to those who use it, familiarise ourselves with its vocabulary and assertions, and consider the claims made for their appropriateness and effectiveness.

We do not take at their face value claims made by users of any particular language for the way it achieves its objects, or even what objects it achieves. We make the same reservations as we do in everyday life. For instance, a gardener can make highly successful use of a greenhouse, but if you ask him how it works, he may tell you that heat is produced by the sun passing through the glass; whereas in fact the glass is only

preventing dissipation of the heat radiated from floor and shelves when the sun's rays fall upon them. Similarly, a Christian may successfully speak of his faith and commend it to others in traditional credal terms such as 'He was crucified . . . he descended . . . he rose . . . he ascended'. He may imagine, mistakenly, that the last three verbs are functioning in the same simple historical manner as the first. Only if he happens to be a philosopher will he be able to meet criticism about their spacial reference, by indicating their odd and distinctive function. Like the gardener, he achieves his object, but may be mistaken as to how it is achieved. Or, a person asked why he is lighting a bonfire on the fifth of November will reply that he is commemorating the Gunpowder Plot; but an anthropologist may tell him that bonfires in late autumn are an institution which goes back a good deal further than 1605, and that he is carrying out a piece of sympathetic magic designed to ensure the return of the sun. The object is in doubt, though the means of achieving it are not in dispute. So the religious man claims that his assertions are informative about God and historical events in which he revealed himself; but the sceptic will say that in fact they are only expressing in dramatic and colourful fable what are basically the moral attitudes and intentions of the speaker.

I have already indicated in the introduction the sorts of tests which the philosopher applies when analysing and evaluating a sphere of discourse. We are now in a better position to see their relevance, and to look at them in a little more detail. If we are analysing and evaluating a work of art, such as a painting, we ask questions of different sorts. 'Why was it painted?' Here we are concerned with the background of the work in terms of the history of art, and the particular school of painters to which the artist belonged. We are also concerned with its placing in his own development as a painter. We are concerned with his motives in painting this particular subject at this particular time. Was he moved by an urge to communicate a visual experience of exciting significance? Or simply by an urge to pay the rent? A masterpiece, or a pot-boiler? Here we pass to the impact on the

viewer, and questions of interpretation. Then we ask, 'How was it painted?' and this question directs us to questions of technique – the choice and quality of material and pigment, their method of application; the composition, the quality and texture of the colour. Finally we ask, 'What is it about?'. Of course there is the simple and obvious answer, that we are looking at Flatford Mill, or the Infanta Beatrice. But we are asking more than this. The work is also 'about' the artist, in so far as he imbues his work with an individual and unique insight. It is also 'about' the mill, or the young princess, in a more than photographic way. Is there being brought home to us as we look an insight of universal significance, of which the landscape or the portrait is simply the vehicle? This raises wide issues of the function of art. Discussion will involve points of view which the connoisseur will bring with him to the picture, rather than read them from it.

These three questions are relevant to distinguishable aspects of a work of art; but they are not distinct, nor can they properly be considered in isolation, for answers inevitably overlap. Choice of subject and technique are obviously closely connected; and both are involved in judgment on artistic insight and ultimate merit. Three similar questions which are closely interrelated, may be asked when we attempt to evaluate a sphere of discourse.

First, 'Why is it used?' Language, like the 'arts', is a product of human creativity. It grows up as a result of the need of members of a particular human group to communicate with one another about shared interests and activities. So we need to know something of the history of a linguistic usage. We are also concerned with the reasons for individual usages. How far are they intended to be simply informative? How far are they intended to evoke in their hearers a special sort of response to the state of affairs indicated? In other words, is the language distinctive in its factual reference, or in its expression of emotional attitudes, or in both?

Second, 'How is it used'. This question directs us to consider the formal, or logical qualities of the language, comparable to questions of technique in painting. We want to know

whether its terms and expressions are 'properly' used, free from vagueness, and ambiguity, for instance. We want to know whether its assertions are related to one another in argument according to the rules of logic. As well as consistency in usage, we expect to find coherence, that is to say, we expect it to cover the whole field for which it is designed in a comprehensive way, leaving no incongruous or irreconcilable elements.

Third, we ask, 'What is it about?' Here we are concerned with the reference of our sphere of discourse. What does it refer to, and how does it describe it? Language must be about some sort of experience, which is its empirical basis. What sort of empirical basis does it claim? If it lies outside of the scope of the verificationst's narrow criteria, what does it claim as 'facts' which are determinative of its usages? This raises the wide issues of the possible functions of language. If the language is metaphysical or religious, can there be metaphysical facts or religious facts? Like the connoisseur of art, the philosopher will bring to this question a point of view which is not itself empirical – a point of view which he does not 'read off' from the particular kind of talk under discussion.

Again, these questions are obviously closely related. In many spheres, the use of language with emotional overtones is reckoned an improper usage. But if the purpose of a language is to communicate attitudes to its objects, and if the emotion felt and communicated is entirely appropriate to the objects, such emotive language may be legitimate. And we can only develop a criterion of such appropriateness, by identifying the supposed objects.

A model for religious language

Language can be about matters of fact according to the scientific model, and accredited by verificational procedures. As we saw, the claim that this is the only way that language can be 'about' things, is simply an option of viewpoint which is itself not verifiable. The way is therefore open for language to be empirical according to different models.

I said that no experience to which language is applied is entirely 'given' – even the simplest sense experience has a mental component. We have to *attend* to some phenomenon or event, and we have to *apprehend* it, according to categories determined by our *interest*. For instance, if we are under the sway of Kepler's dictum, that 'nothing can be known completely except quantities', then our interest will determine that size and weight are the categories by which our minds apprehend some object to which we give our attention. Say it happens to be the painting of my earlier example. Then what we apprehend of it will be in terms of the size, shape and weight of the canvas, and the relative areas and weights of the different kinds of paint applied to it. We would even distinguish between the colours numerically, in terms of Angström units. We would then be able to set down our knowledge of the picture entirely in the language of numerical symbols. Now it scarcely needs to be argued that a page of figures is not equivalent to a painting of Constable's.

The language of the art critic is 'about' a special way of apprehending the picture. The composition which may be one of its merits is in a sense there before us. But if we are novices in the appreciation of art, our attention has to be drawn to it. We have to become interested in it. By listening to the talk of connoisseurs, we learn to operate the mental categories which enable us to apprehend the felicities of the composition of this or any other picture. Becoming aware of the beauty of paintings is a very complex business involving an inner response to their qualities which the language of art has enabled us to apprehend. In comparison with the purely quantitative type of apprehension, the mental component is here more extensive and significant, and involved in subtle ways with the actual canvas.

So the language of art furnishes a model of discourse sponsored, and given relevance by, a special sort of experiencing. It commends this experience to us, but obliquely. It identifies a point of view by showing how things will appear from it – how they will become enjoyable and intelligible. It also affords a model for a sort of discourse which offers an explanation.

This is not explanation of the scientific type; it does not enable us to make predictions, nor does it fit into a body of received knowledge. What it does is to point to a pattern in experience which other spheres have not shown up; much in the way that in the Christmas stocking novelty, a red-masked torch makes 'magic pictures' appear where in white light we see only multi-coloured dots. The pictures that emerge are the key to what the pages of dots are for. So composition, and other artistic elements which the discourse of the critic brings to our attention, are the key to what painting is for. Talk about art is offering an explanation of what art is for, not in terms of the neutral, quantifiable facts of the scientific type, but in terms of a possible experience of a certain pattern. The 'pattern' to which art talk points, and which makes of one canvas a daub and of another a masterpiece, is not entirely objective, but is realised in the experience which such talk aims to make possible. It is not entirely subjective, either, because the experience is realised only in the presence of the painting. Indeed, most of the terms of such talk refer not to the subject who is doing the experiencing, but to the object experienced. If a man says a painting is 'sublime' he does not mean that he feels sublime, but that from the point of view of the person educated in the appraisal of such objects, 'sublime' seems an appropriate epithet for that which induces in him a sense of awe.

Here then we have a model for religious language. Religious language is discourse sponsored by a special sort of experiencing; it commends this experience, by showing how from the distinctive viewpoint which it affords, a pattern is disclosed which furnishes explanation of human experience. Moreover, the distinctiveness of the viewpoint lies in this, that it involves the conception of a supernatural being who is personal, who is both the possible object of experience, and the focus of explanatory patterning.

A programme for investigating some usages of religious language

In subsequent chapters of this book, I intend to examine in some detail certain obvious terms of religious usage. I want to put forward a positive way of regarding their function; and to indicate the grounds on which I think we are justified in continuing to use traditional religious language. We shall be concerned with a certain amount of doctrinal and philosophical history, in order to account for the sort of talk in which our terms appear. I will explore their empirical basis, and indicate key features in experience, to which they draw attention and to which other language does not do justice. We shall look at the overall pattern, and the nature of the distinctive viewpoint associated with it.

Without anticipating the general trend of my argument, there are one or two points to be made. I am not ignoring the fact that many competent philosophers have claimed that religious discourse fails one or other of the tests I have indicated, and that all that can be salvaged from it is better cashed in at once in other discourses – say, those of psychology or ethics. Nor would I have the reader ignorant of the fact that others, perhaps in the believer's eyes more damaging to the faith, have allowed to religious language the status of a valid discourse, but have given an account of its function which is frankly atheistic. For these, religious language is of the same order as unicorn language – intelligible discourse about interesting or useful fictions. 'God' stands for a viewpoint or a pattern or a moral attitude – and that is all. Within the compass of this book it is not possible to present and comment on them. But in fulfilling my more positive purpose, I shall comment obliquely upon them. My discussion in the present chapter has had the purpose of bringing the argument to the point where metaphysical and religious language is once more a serious possibility.

I shall to a large extent be examining the operation of religious language from the inside, and therefore using traditional religious talk to do it, and with this I must ask the

uncommitted reader to bear. I shall assume that assertions about God are not solely statements about possible viewpoints, or patterns discerned. I assume that they are about God. I spoke about the religious viewpoint 'involving the conception of a supernatural being'. To be more specific, I do not think that religious language can be really intelligible unless it is taken to refer beyond the spatio-temporal, to the eternal Object of its traditional reference. In fact, allowing for the changes in philosophical interest and techniques, the point at issue is the perennial one. The questions of the validity and reference of language, the demand for some manner of verification, reduce in the end to the questions 'Is there a God?' and also, 'What think ye of Christ, whose Son is he?'

I do not pretend that I can offer, new, or at second hand, a formula for breaking through the 'God encountering' experience to God Himself. But the division between them is the critic's, not the believer's. And I have indicated that there are grounds for rejecting the division between 'inner experience' on the one hand, and 'facts' or 'states-of-affairs-in-the-world' on the other. However narrow, or broad, the reference of 'fact', such fact must always be realised as an ingredient in someone's inner experience. If my inner experience is not open to verification in terms of someone else's fact, I take this to mean that there is conflict between the way I interpret experience and the way he does.

I cannot show how my talk about a God refers to a real being in the same way that I can show how my talk about a merganser refers to a real duck. A Three-part Invention of Bach has very obvious mathematical properties; and in the same way as mathematical operations are reversible, you can, if you like, produce a not entirely disagreeable sound by playing the music upside down. But if all you choose to consider are mathematical properties, I don't know how I can convince you that there *is* a right way up. You may turn my God-assertion upside down, and make it refer solely to me, and my psychological needs. I don't know how I can convince you about there being a right way round, if the limit of your interest, attention and apprehension is the psychological

effects of language. I might say that if there is really a God, it would be indeed surprising if belief in him didn't provide just these psychological benefits anyway, so how can they argue against him? But to me that is obvious and to you it is irrelevant.

You see your analytical procedures as scientific, objective uses of autonomous Reason, a considerable achievement of human intellectual maturity, sweeping away the lumber of the ages. You follow the argument whithersoever it leads you, accepting with fortitude the logically impeccable aridities which you offer as the fruits of your labour. The believer, on the other hand, claims that without God there can be no true objectivity,[1] that the objectivity claimed for 'autonomous reason' is a caricature, and a sort of idolatry, worshipping a creature of its own contriving, the progeny of unconscious, or at least unacknowledged, assumptions, themselves the product of the intellectual climate of the age. He feels the force of that conceit of Rabelais, when he said that science without conscience is the ruin of souls. He regards it as the task of reason to make intelligible a God-centred view of the world and of man in it; not, with the presumption of a man-centred technique, to create a desert and call it truth.

W. Heath Robinson, whose great achievement was that, at one time or another, he made pieces of knotted string pull everything in the sub-lunar sphere, confided to a friend in his declining years that the great secret grief of his life was that he had never been able to make a piece of knotted string *push* anything. So reason is a tool of infinite versatility; but never can it be an artificer. If God cannot be disposed of by linguistic analysis, neither can he be recalled to existence by emotional attachment to a discerned pattern, or opting for a particular viewpoint. We are confronted here with an urgent choice, which goes beyond the justification of reason, and is prior to any quest for the security of verification.

We leave the world of the unicorn, and enter the realm of the Rock. The latter is very much a biblical image. It carries with it the suggestion of the far-seen landmark, the distant

[1] See p. 129f.

reassuring prospect, the promise to the desert traveller of welcome shade and cool springs. If sometimes it appears detached from earth, we know the ephemeral and delusive nature of the mirage which makes it so. We know it in itself to be steadfast and for ever enduring.

Finally, it would not be unprofitable to the reader, to distinguish the very different sorts of talk which have been set down together in this last section.

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Soul

We commonly speak of having a soul, or of a man consisting of 'body and soul', as though the soul is a thing in the same way as the body is a thing. The word 'soul' has been discredited because although we see at once to what 'body' refers, we cannot identify with any certainty to what 'soul' points. If we can describe a man adequately with other words, we do not need the word 'soul'. The problem then is to see if there is something about people for which the word 'soul' can be appropriately used when no other words will do.

Hebrew 'nephesh' and Greek 'psyche'

How do we come to speak of the soul as a thing? To answer this question we must consider something of the history of the word. Our 'soul' is of Anglo-Saxon origin. Its equivalent in Latin is *anima* and in Greek *psyche*. Both these are connected with the meaning 'air, wind, breath', suggesting the primitive notion of breath as giving life to a man.

For the Hebrews there was no problem. They regarded each man as a body made by God, and completed when he 'breathed the breath of life' into it – that is, animated it. They used the word *nephesh* for this animation. Obviously, to die meant to cease to be animated; so they had no notion of a life after death in any significant sense. (But see below, p. 53, for the Sheol conception.) Reward for good and punishment for evil came in this life. Death ended the possibility of any relationship with God – 'The dead praise thee not, Yahweh, neither they that go down into silence' (Psalm 115: 17). It was late in their history when, by pressure of historical circumstances, they were brought to think of an after life; for

the most obedient seemed to come off worst during religious persecution. The Book of Daniel, written in 165 B.C. to encourage Jews being persecuted for their faith by the Syrian king Antiochus Epiphanes, is one of the earliest books in their literature to speak unequivocally of an after life. It seems to be limited in this case to the very good and the very bad. (Daniel 12: 2.) Then, it was the 'body + *nephesh*' which lived again. Hence the later notion of 'resurrection of the body'.

The Greeks, on the other hand, never thought of the world as being created. Whereas the Hebrews thought of it as essentially good because it was God's handiwork (Genesis 1: 31), the Greeks thought of it as at best neutral, and often as baneful. From Plato's time, the important part of a man was thought to be his inner mental life – his mind, emotions, and will. To this Plato gave the name *psyche*. The psyche was more real than the body – it came from, and could return to, a perfect world or 'heaven' beyond space and time. Our world, he thought, was imperfect, because it was constantly changing, with nothing really lasting. The other world, to which the soul belonged, and which even in this life it could know and have contact with, was perfect because it was unchanging. The soul was not subject to death, though the body was. It was in fact 'immortal'. The body was an encumbrance, and on the whole, an evil. Hence a later saying of Greek religious thought *'soma sema'* (The body is a tomb). The soul came to be spoken of as a real thing somehow temporarily joined to a body.

The real novelty in Plato's notion of immortality lay in the idea of a destiny for man after death – a destiny which was a real, and even superior, kind of life. From the earliest times there had been the notion of bare 'survival' – the result of the inability of primitive man to understand the fact of physical death. Widespread was the notion that the last breath leaving a man's body became an insubstantial replica of the man as he was in life, even to his clothing and weapons and fatal wounds. Hence Macbeth's remark to Banquo's ghost 'Never shake thy gory locks at me . . .', or the headless ghost

of Anne Boleyn. The word *psyche* in Homer means 'ghost' in this sense.

Hades, for the Greeks, was the twilight, subterranean world, inhabited by ghosts. Here there was a bare continuance of identity without joy, feeling, or hope. Belief in this realm of the dead was also widespread among other peoples. The Babylonians called it the Land of No-return, and it appears in the Old Testament as Sheol. This does not conflict with what was said above about the Hebrew view of the after life. There is reason to think that it was a belief surviving from the days before the introduction of the religion of Yahweh; he had no control over it.

The soul as a 'substance'

Following Aristotle, a 'real thing' came, in later thought, to be called a 'substance', and so the soul was spoken of as a substance. This use of substance calls for some explanation, because we now use it simply to mean 'a particular kind of matter'. In philosophy it was used of anything which could have properties – even immaterial things. It is derived from the Latin *sub* (=under), and *stare* (=stand). The use was devised to solve a problem. The short child, the young black-haired man, the old white-haired man are all John Smith. Between infancy and senility, everything changes continuously – everything, that is, except the continuing identity, John Smith. Substance was used to represent the continuing identity – the 'thing in itself', the peg on which different qualities could be hung. 'Substance' stands under the qualities, unseen, but 'having them'. (The technical name for qualities was 'accidents'.) The soul was spoken of as a substance because it was a continuing thing, having qualities, or accidents. It may, for instance, have the qualities of being noble, just, or immortal.

The notion of substance was obviously a useful and commonsense convention. It is of course *only* a convention. An interesting case of its use, worth perhaps a short digression, was its application to the bread and the wine in the Eucharist.

Before and after consecration, the bread and wine look and taste the same. But Christian belief was that something had happened to them. In substance language, it could therefore be said that the accidents (the look, taste and smell of bread and wine) remained the same, but the underlying substance was changed, by consecration, from the normal substance of bread and wine to the substance of the body and blood of Christ. One substance was slid out, to put it crudely, and another was slid in. There was no change in the accidents. A process was envisaged, then, something like that of making secure an ancient building – the façade remains the same, whereas, inside, the structure is supported no longer by crumbling masonry but by unseen steel girders. Now, if you accept the convention of 'substance language', 'transubstantiation', as it was called, afforded an ingenious explanation of what happened.

It was not very long before the weakness of 'substance language' was pointed out. After all, all that we see, hear, touch or smell of anything at all are its qualities. We never see the peg of substance they are supposed to hang on. Why not say that things are just bundles of qualities, rather than complicate the matter by saying that there is an underlying something, never seen, which 'has them'? At any rate, in the matter of the soul, even if there is such a thing as substance, why have two for each man? The substance of the body, and the soul-substance as well? The idea of the soul being a substance was discarded, 'it being', as John Locke said, 'not much more remote from our comprehension to conceive that God can, if he pleases, add to matter a property of thinking, than that he should add to it *another* substance with a faculty of thinking'.

It was 'soul-substance' theories that had led to the notion of a man 'having a soul', or something additional to his body. The difficulty was to identify it, and to find a point of attachment; to decide when it came and when it left. These puzzles lie behind Professor Ryle's ironic description of the soul as the 'ghost in the machine'. People will no doubt go on talking about 'having a soul'. But if we say rather 'a man *is* a soul', the puzzles disappear. The problem then becomes: 'What

are the distinctive characteristics of human beings, as distinct from other organisms, which justify our using this special term to describe them?' Do we need the word, or is what it points to already catered for?

'Having a meaning' and 'having a tune' as parallel cases

A parallel case to the expression 'a man has a soul' is the expression 'a word has a meaning'. A word articulated is simply a sound like any other sound. The branch of science which takes care of sounds is acoustics. It does so by counting vibrations, and by comparing them on this basis – that is, quantitatively. Will acoustics be able to point out to us which sounds 'have meanings'? Will acoustics be able to distinguish between the beating of a drum and a proposal of marriage? No. Our expression 'having a meaning' might mislead us into thinking that there was something odd added to sounds to make them into words – a sort of unsounded sound, paralleled by the notion of an 'incorporeal substance' thought to be added to a man, whereby we speak of him 'having a soul'. How in fact do we distinguish the sounds which are words? By identifying those which fit into a different set of rules. The set of rules which identifies and arranges meanings is grammar. It is appropriate to say of a particular sound, for instance, *both* that it consists of so many vibrations, *and* that it is a noun, the subject of a sentence, or an adjective. The two sets of rules, acoustics and grammar, are without connection, in that we could never deduce the rules of grammar from the rules of acoustics. Words are identifiable simply as sounds which we find it appropriate to speak about in a special way.

Another example from sounds may be instructive. Say we write down a random series of notes, and hand this to an acoustician. He will interpret these as a series of numbers – each note has a value in decibels. Give him ten such series, and he will give us ten rows of numbers. Now, if we play each series on the piano, we shall find perhaps that some of them turn out to be musical tunes. Could we have seen which

were tunes by inspecting the rows of numbers? No. How then do we identify tunes? Simply because we find that we can speak of certain of these rows in a way that we cannot speak of the others. We may want to say of some that they are moving, or romantic, or exciting, or sad. We do not say this of rows of numbers. So tunes are collections of sounds which we find it appropriate to speak about in a special way.

Apply these examples to the issue of the soul. We take a random selection of higher vertebrates. We compare them all in terms of their anatomy and physiology. Will these studies tell us whether or no we should speak of them having souls? No. What tells us which to apply the word to? It is the fact that we find it appropriate to say of some of them, and not of others, that they are good, or wicked, or brave, or cowardly, or generous or selfish. Souls are mammals which we find it appropriate to speak about in a special way.

Nothing is added to a sound to make it a word. Nothing is added to a series of notes to make it a tune. Nothing is added to an organism to make it a soul. The rules of grammar, or of music, cannot be deduced from acoustics. The rules which govern the way we talk of men as souls cannot be deduced from biology, or physiology, or psychology.

Psychologists of certain schools of thought might make an objection here. I have been trying to maintain that 'soul' is appropriate to human beings as distinct from animals, because of the way we need to talk about them. The critic's case would be as follows: 'The words like good, brave, wicked, and so on – spiritual epithets as you would call them – each of them has two components. One component describes the behaviour, the other evaluates it in terms of praise or blame. All that can be said of the mentality of animals is the result of studying their behaviour. Men are not exceptions. When you describe a man as brave, you are describing his behaviour as of a certain kind, in a particular situation. The evaluative part of your description is a piece of your own behaviour. It is "linguistic behaviour" – significant as descriptive of you, in so far as it describes what in a similar situation would be your behaviour.'

According to this view, known as 'behaviourism', man only differs from the rest of the animal kingdom in being more elaborate in his organisation, individually and socially. The difference between a rat running in the psychologist's maze, and a prime minister in his study is only one of degree – a prime minister being only a very complicated rat. To justify our use of the word 'soul', and indeed the whole notion that man can be spoken of appropriately in a religious context, we must maintain that there is a difference in kind. We must try to show that when we apply moral or spiritual epithets to a man, we are describing more than his behaviour.

Epithets appropriate to man describe more than behaviour

If we put a rat in a maze, and he learns to perform in certain ways to get food, we say 'This rat is purposive'. In this case we are describing what the rat has *done* in a particular situation arranged for experimental purposes. If we say 'This man is benevolent', we feel that we are describing the man as he *is* in himself, and not some particular piece of behaviour. The following considerations would seem to support this.[1]

1. We know what we mean to say about the man when we say that he is benevolent, without being sure what we are saying about his conduct, because he can show his benevolence in a limitless number of ways.

2. Exactly the same behaviour may be benevolent in one situation, but not in another. I give five pounds which I can ill afford to another. I am benevolent if I know and intend that he should use it to feed his family in need. But I am malevolent if I know and intend that he will spend it on a drunken spree; thinking it worth five pounds to be quit of a rival.

(We may put these two points in another way by saying that no moral description inevitably involves actions which

[1] For much of the following I am indebted to J. R. Lucas, *Faith and Logic* Ch. 5.

can be specified: and no descriptions of actions inevitably involve attributing a corresponding moral epithet.)

3. Recognition of the qualities of others is not a matter of weighing evidence, but is an immediate perception, akin to our recognition of appearance. When I see someone I have seen before, I say, 'I recognise that face'. This recognition is the immediate perception of a whole. I do not go through the features one by one in my mind, comparing them with a mental card index of features, until I come upon a record of this particular combination. It has been suggested that some such process does in fact take place, but so speeded up that we do not notice it. Against this, 'instant recognition' is an obvious fact of experience. Moreover, there may in fact be true recognition together with a total inability to specify individual features. (Recognition seems to be the result of a capacity which varies with individuals. In the Air Force during the war, rapid recognition of other aircraft was of vital importance. Some men could identify an aircraft at once, in any attitude. Others could not. The teaching of aircraft recognition by the specification of details and proportions did not seem to result in very much improvement in speed of recognition among those without the natural ability.) My point is that we recognise qualities in persons in much the same way, without specifying or predicting conduct. 'I think he is a good man' does not mean that I have examined every aspect of his behaviour which is accessible to me, and decided that I am justified in applying the word 'good' to that special combination of actions. It means that I have perceived directly in the man a quality which I recognise, as a result of personal contact. I recognise something to which my own inner experience in some way points.

4. We know our own inner experience – our feelings, thoughts, intentions; and we resist the idea that our behaviour gives an exhaustive account of it. We resist the suggestion, for instance, that 'I have a pain' means simply 'I have a tendency to sit in a doctor's waiting room for an hour, and then to answer certain questions by the doctor in certain ways'. Of two identical actions, one may be aimlessly performed, the

other premeditated and morally purposed. To refuse to regard as relevant anything but observable action in talking about human beings seems perverse. For the mental situations that go with actions are just as much facts – and highly pertinent facts – although not observable in the same way. You have to have inward human experience before you can account for the behaviour to which it may give rise.

(A test of the claims made in the last two sections might be to consider which of the following is usually more true to our actual experience: 'X is my friend. When you get to know him, you realise how good and kind he is', or, 'X behaved in such a good and kind way, that I decided to make him my friend.')

Characteristics of man as 'soul'

I have presented the word 'soul' as claiming that a human organism is appropriately spoken of in ways which are not appropriate to other animal organisms; and also that a man is somehow more than his publicly observable behaviour. The word 'person', of course, is commonly used to express this distinction. The word 'soul', however, places a person in a distinctively religious context. It claims that the human person is only truly seen for what he is when he is seen in relation to God. Before I discuss the conception of God, there are three characteristics of man as 'soul' which must be considered; and also the Christian view of his destiny.

SINGULARITY

Homo sapiens is man viewed as a member of the animal kingdom, of which 'rat' is another member. Any particular rat is an example simply of a class. The class is defined by the attributes which it is agreed to apply to its members – for example, vertebrate, rodent, small, furry, and so on. 'A rat' is a collection of qualities and no more. We might say that one rat is as good as another; but few would say the same of prime ministers. A man is more than a particular member of the class *homo sapiens*.

Why does Joan love John? She will say, perhaps, 'Because

he is tall and handsome'. 'But so are Fred, Jim and George,' you reply. 'Well, John is good and kind as well.' 'But so are Fred and Jim.' Every combination of qualities Joan mentions can be paralleled in someone else. In the end Joan gets cross, and says, 'I love him because he is John and no one else', or 'There simply isn't anyone quite like my John'. She is right. He is in one sense a particular member of a class 'young men'. Within that class he may have distinctive qualities, as one rat may differ from another in incidental ways. But the most important thing about John is that for Joan he is 'in a class by himself'. However many words you apply to John which are applicable to different qualities and sizes, there is always something left over – his uniqueness as John, or as I prefer to call it, his singularity. 'Soul' points to this singularity. 'Person' does not always do this. For instance, it may be used by the sociologists to describe a unit of human society; or by the psychologist to describe characteristics of mentality identifiable as being shared by others: but not capturing uniqueness within its meaning – that which John shares with no one. This can only be described as 'John-ness' – that, in fact, which is covered by a proper name. How we can be said to *describe* singularity, which by definition is apparently beyond the reach of all descriptive terms, will be matter for later consideration.[1]

FREEDOM

The Christian believer claims that man has free will. Though he may not exercise it in all his actions, he is able to make a free choice, and implement it. A rat's actions are wholly conditioned by his nature and environment. A man is conditioned too, in the sense that the range of his choices may be limited by environment. But they are not fixed, or determined for him. This is the claim that raises the age-old debate about the possibility of freedom. Viewed from the outside it looks as though a man cannot help doing what he does – all the factors of temperament and environment seem to form a complete story of causes and effects leading up to an action.

[1] See p. 92f.

Viewing the action from the inside, the man feels certain that his action is the result of a free choice; even though he admits that there are conditioning pressures, he feels that he is using a power within him which is autonomous. Autonomous means self-governing; it was used in connection with the will first by the German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804). The name given to the belief that everything men do is decided for by nature plus environment is 'determinism'. Dr Johnson summarised the issue by saying of determinism: 'All argument is for it: all experience is against it.'

When a man makes a free choice, the actions which result become part of his personal history, and facts in the world. All facts in the world are open to inspection, and it is the business of the various sciences to examine each and every fact, and show the causes which led up to them. The facts which are the result of acts of will are not exceptions to this – in fact it would be very odd if an act of will produced a situation which could not be explained in terms of causes. What a man does at the moment of choice is to decide which particular series of causes and effects in his past personal history is going to be the significant one in explaining this particular act. When a man freely chooses, he is choosing his past as well as his future.

An illustration may make clear what I mean. I stand on the corner of the street, wondering whether to visit auntie, or go to the county match. Leading to this moment of decision are two parallel cause and effect stories. The first is about my relation to auntie, starting from my early memory of the ice-cream she bought me at Brighton, and going right through my life, to the affectionate concern I feel for her as I stand here. The second is about cricket, from the first form match, through countless nets and cricket pitches, to the expectant enthusiasm I feel as I think about this match. I decide to go to see auntie. In so doing, I direct my biographer to the first story – pointing out to him, as it were, all the features of my past which he must regard as predominantly significant, if he is to explain my visit satisfactorily. Cricket is simply a game I was interested in when not engaged with family ties. Or

perhaps I decide to go to the match. The second causal story then becomes the important one. Family ties are something I fitted into the gaps between playing and watching cricket.

I am also making the one or the other story important to myself; in this way I am shaping my future. I do not mean in the matter of a legacy from auntie, nor yet a letter from the M.C.C. selectors. I mean that I am shaping towards the sort of person who puts pleasing an old aunt even before the great national game. Or I may be shaping towards the sort of person who rates certain personal pleasures higher than my family. Here, and now, it is up to me. In either case, my decision is an act of taking a mere possibility, and making it a reality, making it part of the fixed and stable past. It inevitably *looks* as though I could not help choosing as I did, because the causes and effects which lead up to *any* event are traceable, once it has happened. But in the act of choosing, I was aware of myself not as just an actor in a cause and effect story, but as its author.

LOVE

The third claim about man as soul is that his proper and typical activity is love. He is moved by a force or power within himself towards self-assertion. Paradoxically, he only properly asserts himself, and becomes what he should be, through his relationship with other souls. 'Love' is the Christian word used to describe this self-fulfilment in others.

I chose the example of the young man and girl 'in love' because in this situation the characteristics of individuals take on a heightened significance. But an equally typical human situation is love or intimate friendship between any persons. Love and friendship are generally regarded as not only typical but highly desirable, according to popularly accepted standards of what is worth while. The second quality, that of freedom, was based also on such an appeal to ordinary experience. When we act we feel ourselves to be doing so freely. There are of course occasions when we might say that our action has not our full personal backing, such as when we are under some sort of strong external pressure, or when we act

according to strong habit. But it is in our personal relationships that we would usually claim that we are most free. (If we deny freedom here, it is most likely that it is because we know of a theory which tells us that our actions are determined: rarely is it a report on what we actually feel.) Our free action is most typically seen in connection with persons – in fact as a reaction or response of our own singularity to the singularity of another. We intentionally direct ourselves, as it were, towards them; perhaps at first it is a direction parallel to them.

Joan and John share an activity – their intentions and interest are parallel. As a result of this they come to know one another very well – in fact the singularity of John increasingly impresses itself upon Joan, so that her willing in regard to him comes to distinguish itself from her willing towards any one else, to such an extent perhaps that he becomes her exclusive concern; or at least, everything else is seen in relation to its bearing upon her concern for him. Her attitude to John she feels to be appropriate only to him. She comes to love him 'for himself alone'. More often than not, the process has worked on John's side too. In the meantime, everything that is distinctive about Joan she begins, wittingly or unwittingly, to deploy in a way which will express her regard for him. In fact, the singularity of Joan only comes to full realisation and development in relation to John. And the same is true of John in relation to Joan. Their attitudes, or habitual intention towards one another is in a sense the substance of their union in love, which is their full self-realisation. It is in this relationship that the singularity of each becomes real.

There is, therefore, an intimate connection between these three characteristics of man as soul. They are not static qualities like brown eyes or broad shoulders. They are active and dynamic, only realising their full activity in personal relationships. We need other people in order to become ourselves.

'Soul' and 'person'

The words 'soul' and 'person' are obviously close kin. Christians speak of God as a person, for instance, and we shall later be considering what is meant by this. In fact the word 'person' owes its present range of meaning to theological discussion about the Trinity, in the fourth century. Originally, *persona* in Latin, and its Greek equivalent *prosopon*, meant the human face. So it came to be used for the mask which an actor wore in the ancient theatre. Not unnaturally, the meaning was transferred to the part represented – in fact, to the character in the drama. As a legal term, it was the equivalent of our 'party' to a process or transaction in law.

There are some degraded uses of 'person' and 'personality' in contemporary English. Person can mean simply a human unit, with a plural, in Civil Service English, of 'personnel', used like the older 'hands' in ship or factory. 'Personality' has come to mean simply someone who is well known, especially in the entertainment industry. It is interesting that even in these uses, 'soul' has been used interchangeably – for instance, 'She sailed with three hundred souls aboard', or 'Old King Cole was a merry old soul'. However, even the more sober uses of 'person' and 'personality', for instance in the fields of education or psychology, do not always carry with them the full Christian connotation of the terms. A familiar usage, in which 'person' falls short of what is claimed by 'soul' is somewhat as follows. A person is an individual unit capable of full development, one condition of this being satisfactory personal relationships. In the same way as we can develop a human body and assess progress under the separate headings of, say, muscular power, co-ordination, mastery of skills, so we may develop a human personality, and assess it under separate headings. These may include intelligence, perseverance, emotional stability, and so on – and one of these will be personal relationships. This objective view of a human person has practical purposes and advantages, but it cannot give a complete account of him. All human capacities are only significant in the context of persons loving other persons. This context

for Christians is one in which God is involved. 'Soul' makes the claim for man which 'person' in this usage does not. It is claiming for each unique individual more than can be described in a summary of qualities and capacities attributed to a man as an object of study, and having certain relations with 'objects' of the same kind. Man is not a soul in isolation. He is a soul in relationship with other souls, under God.

The practical advantages of regarding the individual objectively and in isolation, and the point at which this must give way to considering him as inextricably involved in his relations with others, and in a sense constituted by them, will appear from a common example. A boy begins to behave in an extravagant and antisocial way. He is sent to a psychiatrist, who examines his behaviour and questions him. He regards him objectively, in order to discover what category he belongs to – what class of case he may be. For similar modes of behaviour will have had similar causes in others. The probable cause is established – perhaps jealousy of a favoured brother; or parents whose behaviour alternates erratically between severity and indulgence. However, the cause being known, it is no longer appropriate to treat the boy as a case, nor as an individual in isolation. Putting things right involves the whole family. The odd behaviour was in a sense part of the behaviour of the whole group. The only treatment is the very delicate business of altering the whole balance of relationships. The singularity of each member of the family must realise itself in different intentions and attitudes from those which went before. Perhaps more than the family group is involved – a large number of people may have been accessories before the fact of the theft from the school tuck shop, or whatever it was. It is not surprising that this demands a programme of reorientations both far reaching and complex. It is here that the Christian will claim to be able to make a most significant contribution, because he claims to have a guide to right relationships between persons in his conception of the right relation between persons and God.

A function of soul, then, can be to qualify and correct some defective uses of person. Indeed, the same sort of qualification

must be borne in mind when we come to speak of God as Person. Within the Christian tradition, at least, it has never been thought appropriate to talk of God as Soul. But there is a danger that in speaking of him as a Person, we may think of him as some sort of supreme Object, different only in greatness from other objects. In our own time, the religious philosopher Paul Tillich has thought to meet this danger by denying that God is *a* person,[1] allowing only that we speak of him symbolically as personal. The purport of this distinction, and the meaning of 'symbolically' here, will perhaps become clearer when we come to consider ways of talking about God in the following chapter.

Beyond death

I have tried to justify the use of the word 'soul' as pointing to empirical facts about mankind, to which other spheres of discourse do not do full justice. These spheres are concerned with what is in space, and enduring through time. We may therefore describe them as 'spatio-temporal' spheres or languages. 'Soul' claims that the singularity of human individuals cannot be fully described in spatio-temporal terms. If man's singularity is out of the reach of spatio-temporal language, so is the destiny of that singularity. In other words, the way seems open for considering man to have a destiny beyond this life.

As is well known, 'soul' does commonly carry along with it such a suggestion, as for instance when it is said, 'The soul is immortal'. Notice here that such a statement is analytical rather than synthetic. It does not mean, 'The soul has observable qualities, one of which is immortality'. Immortality is not an observable characteristic of the soul, as webbed feet were an observable characteristic of the flamingo. Rather, 'The soul is immortal' means 'I use the word soul for a human person conceived religiously as having a destiny beyond death'. In other words, there is no question of proving immortality. What we have done is to describe man in such a way that

[1] Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, I, p. 271.

immortality is possible. Spatio-temporal language is concerned with things in space which have a beginning and end in time. When applied to man, it can properly speak of aspects of him which also have a beginning and end in time – when speaking of him as an animal organism, for instance, which obviously has an end in time – physical death. But the singularity of man as denoted by 'soul' is out of reach of description as 'having an end in time'.

Now, 'having a destiny beyond death' is commonly taken, among Christians, to be equivalent to speaking of the soul of man as immortal. The conception of immortality is not, however, confined to Christianity. And in fact a very real distinction may be made between the Christian view of man's destiny, and that sponsored by the more widely held belief in immortality. This will become clear if we consider the three ways in which men have thought of an after life.

Survival and immortality

Survival is the bare continuance of life, already mentioned as the expectation of primitive peoples. The after life is vaguely conceived as similar to this one, but it is in many ways limited, although not in duration, being thought of as endless. It is not, in fact, a destiny to be looked forward to with hope. The 'ghosts' of the dead sometimes appear to the living in visions and dreams – indeed, vivid dreams of those who have died may be the origin of the belief. Ghosts may also be deliberately made to appear in order that they may be consulted about the future. This is the magical practice known as 'necromancy'. Thus Saul, feeling abandoned by his God, went to the witch of Endor, who 'raised' the ghost of Samuel, and the king enquired how he would fare against the Philistines in what proved to be his last battle (I Samuel 28: 3-25).

Necromancy, and this conception of survival, is represented in the modern world by the beliefs and practices known as 'spiritualism'. Messages claimed to have been received from the 'spirits' of the dead speak sometimes of a life very much like this one – they appear to live in houses, with gardens, trees

and flowers, in a sort of everlasting suburbia. Unlike the primitive conception, however, this perpetuation of the trivial is regarded by the modern spiritualist as something to be looked forward to with hopeful expectancy.

To believe in immortality is to believe that there is a separable part of man which is, by its very nature, not subject to death. It is interesting to notice that arguments which will support this sort of life after death will also involve the notion of a similar life before birth – which was in fact Plato's belief. The feeling of sadness which so often forms part of the experience of beauty in this life, is due, he claimed, to a vague sense of being deprived of the perfection of beauty which we knew before birth in a human body. 'Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting.' Our immediate response to beauty and goodness when we experience them, Plato regarded as the strongest empirical basis of a belief in immortality. He also pointed to our immediate assent to analytical statements, especially those of mathematics. We at once appreciate that the angles of an isosceles triangle are equal, once the fact is pointed out to us. Such knowledge is not gained from experience; it must therefore have been born in us. He also argued from the nature of the soul. Its highest faculty is that of rationality, and he described this as simple and indivisible. Destruction always means breaking down into constituent parts. What is not divisible must also be indestructible.

Some eastern religions share the view of the soul as an immortal part of man. But for them the soul's destiny is not viewed as a continuance of individual existence (there are exceptions to this, for instance Bhakti, and some sects of Buddhism). This view sees man's body as that which makes him an individual: his soul is part of a universal Soul, from which it is temporarily separated, but into which it is eventually reabsorbed. This universal Soul is not personal, and is appropriately spoken of not as Him but as It. To be individual, personal, and separate, is the inevitable misfortune of human life, made tolerable only by the knowledge that in the end we are part of that in which there is no distinction or activity – 'Thou art That' is the basic belief of Hinduism, for

instance. All that makes man what we have called 'singular' is deplored: to cease to be singular is the aim of life.

Associated with this belief is the doctrine of Karma. Karma means 'work' or 'deed', and claims that the goal of reabsorption is reached only after successive rebirths. The status of a soul in its next incarnation is determined by its moral achievement in the present. Ill-doing is punished by rebirth to a lowlier status of human society, or even by transmigration into an animal body. Promotion follows moral achievement, until, finally, release may be hoped for. 'They who seek the Atman (i.e. the Universal Soul, or Absolute) by austerity, chastity, faith and knowledge . . . they do not return.' Two objections may be made to the notion of Karma. First, the notion that the whole universe is organised on a basis of impersonal and inexorable retributive justice is repugnant to most people. Second, punishment or reward at different human, or animal, levels can only really *be* punishment or reward, if the subject of it is somehow aware of his previous existence. It may seem appropriate to punish brutishness in man by turning him into a brute. On the other hand, brutishness is natural to brutes. A pig apparently finds it no hardship to be a pig; so far as we can judge, he enjoys it. Some sort of conscious memory of past lives is indeed essential to the claim of continuing individual identity through Karma. In the end, Leibnitz's questions are unanswerable: 'What good would it do you, Sir, to become King of China on condition that you forget what you have been? Would it not be the same as if God, at the moment he destroyed you, were to create a king in China?'

Christian belief in 'eternal life'

Christians do not believe that man is by nature immortal, but that his true destiny is to enjoy 'eternal life' or 'life everlasting'. This expression is a paradox, that is, apparently self-contradictory. For 'life' is by definition, and normal usage, a finite thing, beginning with birth and ending with death. Qualified by 'eternal', it points not to duration, but to a *kind*

of life. 'Eternal' translates a Greek word *aionios*, which is an adjective from *aion*, meaning 'an age, or era'. It refers to the technical Jewish expression 'the Coming Age', or the 'Messiah's Age'; as opposed to the 'Present Age'. So eternal life means 'living the life which is appropriate to the Messiah's Age'. Now the whole of Jesus' teaching turns on the proclamation that the Messiah's age has started, and that he initiates it. He proclaims the Kingdom, or Rule, of God – a new age has started, in which a new corporate life with God is possible through him, Jesus. Jesus claims to open to men the love of God, on a new footing, and invites them to return that love, in a supreme personal relationship. Eternal life *is* this relationship. It is the present experience of the love of God shown to us in Christ. It does not start when we die. It starts when we are baptised. 'And this is eternal life, to know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.' (John 17: 3.)

The Christian life is a process of developing towards ever fuller communion with God. Though we remain creatures, we may aspire to share his divine life. If we share his life, we share his eternity, though without loss of personal identity. Those who are 'risen with Christ' (St Paul thus describes baptism) can join in a life which carries with it the promise of everlastingness. To those who experience such a life, death seems but an incident, for 'nothing can separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord'.

Christians claim that this new, or eternal life, is essentially communal. Although the ultimately significant thing about human experience is the singularity of the individual, yet this singularity is only properly realised in a community orientated or pointed towards God as its founder and head. A sound, as we saw, exists simply as a sound: it has meaning when it is found in a particular context, that is, when it has a grammatical place in speech, or a musical place in a melody. Similarly, an irregularly shaped piece of plywood coloured on one side, may exist as just that and no more. But it takes on a meaning when it fits into an appropriate place in a jigsaw puzzle – giving meaning, and taking meaning by its unique

placing. So it is with man as a soul, fitting into a complex of human relationships, both realising his own singular significance, and evoking it in others.

The Christian view of man's destiny is, then, a continuity of selfhood, in community with others, through death and beyond death. Whatever we say of it must be understood figuratively. But the great Christian hope is that the new dimension of life embarked upon at our baptism, comes to fruition beyond death in depth and richness and vision in the near presence of God, which is beyond our present understanding. 'Beloved,' says the writer of the first letter of John, 'now are we children of God, and it is not yet made manifest what we shall be. We know that, if he shall be manifested, we shall be like him; for we shall see him even as he is.'

5
God

In the language of the Dakota Indians, *Wakan Tanka* means the Great Mystery, an all-powerful being who created the world. Most languages name such a being, speaking of him as supreme, and often as creator. Thus: Nainema (South America, Uitoto Indians), Brahma (ancient Hindu), Wodan (Teutons), Osiris (ancient Egyptians), Marduk (Babylonians), Lezu (Bantu), Katonda (Buganda), Yahweh (ancient Hebrews), Allah (Arabs). Our word is God, which we use very much in the manner of a proper name. We use other words as descriptive or reverential synonyms, such as Lord, Almighty, Creator, Maker, Supreme Being, Providence.

What is 'God' the name of? Religious people claim that it is the name of a real being, who, although unseen, is 'there'; they claim, moreover that this being is in some sense personal, so that they may with propriety refer not to it but to him. Sceptics, however, draw our attention to the fact that we often use proper names, and even personal names, for important aspects of our lives, as gamblers might speak of Lady Luck. John Bull, Tommy Atkins, Uncle Sam – these are names which draw together and make personal what men experience and feel themselves to be as a nation, or as an army. 'God' may be just a way of drawing together all that we feel about moral value and moral endeavour. Or people might admit the argument of the last chapter, and accept that the most significant feature of human life is human singularity in deep personal interrelation; but say that what we mean by God is simply this.

The religious man will reply that when he speaks of John Bull, he knows and intends that his reference should be not to a real person, but to our national character and life, made

personal in a symbolic way. But when he speaks of God, to regard this as taking some aspect of human experience and making it personal in a symbolic way, would be to take from his assertion the meaning which he intended it to have. We do not call a man a sceptic for telling us what Uncle Sam really refers to; but we do call a man a sceptic who claims to be able to tell us what God 'really' refers to. R. B. Braithwaite has been prominent among those who claim that assertions about God are really disguised moral assertions – indicating an intention on the part of the speaker to act in accordance with the ethic of the Christian society, the Church. The scriptures then have the function of evoking moral attitudes, and sustaining them in times of difficulty, by offering 'stories' which are psychologically effective.

As a believer I cannot accept the contention that my assertions about God are really expressions of my own moral attitudes. They are effective for me *because* I take them to refer to a being other than myself on whom I am dependent. If I came to believe that all they did was to present graphically my attitudes and intentions, they would cease even to do this job properly. 'The Lord is my strength', I may say. The sceptic tells me that I really mean that I have a quiet confidence in my intention to act in a particular way; just as when I pick up a royal flush, I may think 'Luck is on my side', meaning that I have a quiet confidence that I am about to win a fiver. But when originally I said, 'The Lord is my strength', even though as yet I do not know him, I thought I was making a statement about a Being who is 'there', and that my confidence was an appropriate response to his reported power and constancy. Now the sceptic is telling me that I was really talking about myself. And the more convinced I become that he is right, the less confident do I feel that my confidence was appropriate. In other words, I find it impossible to assert confidently that 'The Lord is my strength' and *at the same time* believe that the sole function of that assertion is to give me mental comfort. It seems, then, that if Braithwaite is right, and the real function of religious statements is moral, they can only perform their true function if we are ignorant of it.

Psychologically it seems that reference beyond ordinary experience is essential to the proper functioning of religious assertions; this does not of course prove that the belief in the Being beyond experience is a true belief, but that significant talk about God demands this reference. And certainly, talk about Him is quite different from talk about Luck or John Bull. I do not need assurance of supernatural support to win a hand at poker. I do need it to live the moral life which is distinctively Christian.

If the notion of a God is so widespread it must be that something in experience has been taken to point beyond itself. In order to identify this factor in experience, and to estimate the validity of the inferences from it, we must first look briefly at the history of the idea of God – to answer, in fact, the question, 'Why do men talk about Him?'.

Primitive origins

Primitive man seems to have thought of the world of nature as operating in the same way as he did. He moved his limbs at will: so the tree waved its branches at will. In the same way, the river flowed, or the storm struck, by their own volition. Then, perhaps through the experience of his dreams, in which, though his body lay in the cave, 'he' ventured in war or the chase, he came to distinguish between that which did the willing, and that which obeyed its commands. He distinguished between the willing 'self' and the body through which it operated. So he reached the stage called Animism, in which he understood each natural object to be controlled by a self or 'spirit' which inhabited it. Because of the evident power of these natural objects, a power far superior to his own, it was important that he conciliate them. By doing what he could to secure the wellbeing of their spirits, he could keep them on his side. Moreover, they must not fail or weaken. A river which dried up was as dangerous to human economy as a river which burst its banks. Appropriate offering must be made to the spirit of the river. (Building a bridge over a river was something of a liberty. So it had to be performed with

appropriate ceremonies of propitiation. This survived in ancient Rome, where bridging the Tiber was vital to the city's life, in the title of 'pontifex'. Pontifex was a chief priest; it means, literally, a bridge-builder. We still use 'pontiff' as a synonym for bishop.)

It seems that from the first, side by side with operations and offerings expressive of submission to natural forces, went practices intended in part to coerce them. In other words, religion and magic seem to go hand in hand. Magic is a primitive technology – intended, for instance, to *make* the river flow abundantly, or the crops grow well. Its practice is intermingled with prayer and offering to the spirits concerned.

Kings and chiefs of more than average achievement also became objects of worship – so Osiris, the Egyptian God, associated with vegetation, may have been an early king who introduced irrigation to the Nile valley. Food supply is of course a constant preoccupation of man in the scarcity economy of his primitive or barbaric state. Magico-religious operations are centred on the increase or maintenance of it. Abundance and fertility depend to a great degree on the 'life-stuff' which was thought of as being all-pervasive, and which primitive man was constantly trying to secure for himself, and for his purposes. It was vaguely associated with blood, which was thought of as the essential life of man and beast. Poured on the ground, it increased the yield; drunk by man it increased his vitality. Hence the practice of sacrifice, animal and human, which long survived the primitive stage of development. Spirits and gods found in it an acceptable source of nourishment – for even gods could starve, as the Babylonian 'Epic of Gilgamesh' shows happened during the Flood. Kings, culture-heroes, and ancestors, if properly worshipped, would pass on to the living the power which made them great in life.

A curious factor in the religion of many primitive peoples is the belief in a 'High God'. Thus in addition to deified kings and ancestors and potent spirits of nature, who required frequent ceremonial worship, there is often found a belief in a remote but all-powerful being, who exercises general rather

than particular control. This High God is very rarely the object of any cult practice, and in fact for all practical purporses, they ignore him. He is just 'out there'. It is less likely that monotheism is a refinement from polytheism, than that it is a direct development of the conception of a High God.

The Greeks were of course polytheists, at least in their inherited, tribal religion. The Greek word for god was *theos*. Originally this word was adjectival. It was applied to anything in nature more powerful and enduring than man, or beyond his control. So lightning was *theos*, and so was storm, and sea, and sky. They are Gods by virtue of their power. The Greeks also used *theos* of human experiences which transcend the individual – war, and peace, and love. Friendship, even, is *theos*. The dramatic poet Sophocles expresses our cliché 'This thing is bigger than both of us' by saying, 'Recognition between friends is *theos*'. So the Greeks were polytheists – believing in many gods, each with proper names.

Primitive religion, then, is the source of many images of the divine being and of divine action, which have lived on in the 'higher religions' of the world. He is the King, the Father, the sustainer of the world, the source of life and power; his power and life are moreover available for the true worshipper. We must, incidentally, be on our guard against the specious argument sometimes known as the 'genetic fallacy' – the argument that to know a thing's origins is to know it all; in this case, the suggestion that to know of religion's crude and humble origins is to dispose of the claims of its fully developed forms.

God in the thought of Plato and Aristotle

For Plato the philosopher, the highest sort of experience man could have was of Goodness. The key feature of his thought was man's moral experience, and his reaching out for the perfection of truth, beauty, and goodness. This reaching out, Plato felt, must be to a real object – in fact to a perfection not of this world, but of a higher world, which was everlasting and unchanging, and of which this world was but an imper-

fect copy. This higher world was the world of 'ideas'. Idea is from the Greek word for form, or shape. The word has a long subsequent history in philosophy, leading to our ordinary and rather colourless use of it to mean some sort of thought in the mind. But for Plato the 'Ideas' were not thoughts, but perfect forms – things existing in their own right. Everything in this world copies an Idea – not only in the case of objects, like trees or horses, but also abstractions, like justice or temperance. Supreme among the ideas was the Idea of the Good, which was indeed *theos*. The Good is God. This seems to be what Plato would probably claim if he could be questioned; but in fact he uses the word God very freely, and also Gods, and it seems that he is in both usages reflecting popular conceptions of the personality of God or the Gods, as a means of portraying the Ideas. For all the nobility of his conception of Perfection itself as the final ground of all things, and as the explanation of the universe, there is no room for a personal God in his system.

Aristotle was a disciple of Plato, but his key feature was very different. His father was a doctor, and his own interests were scientific, especially biological. Plato's concern had been with inward experience: but Aristotle's starting point was outward appearance. He explained each and every object in terms of two aspects, form and matter. Form was the essential qualities and functions which distinguish a thing as what it is and nothing else. Matter was the stuff a thing was composed of – not matter as we conceive it, but an indeterminate stuff, without any qualities until form was imposed upon it. This was his Hylomorphic Theory, and with it he constructed a highly ingenious picture of the whole universe.[1] But given his picture of what the universe was like, how was he to bring it to life? What produced motion and change, life and death? His answer was – God.

What was Aristotle's God like? In answering this question we must understand a fundamental difference between his scientific thinking and ours. We think of change and move-

[1] See Appendix I.

ment in nature as the product of forces pushing, as it were, from behind. Aristotle, on the other hand, and with him many of the ancients, saw change as a result of attraction, or pulling from in front. The ultimate force of attraction lay outside of the natural order, it was the most perfect Form, to which all others are drawn. Motion is, in fact, the result of 'appetition', or desire of lower forms for the supreme Form, which is God. 'It's love that makes the world go round' – in origin, this is not a piece of proverbial sentimentality: it is a plain statement of the principle of Aristotle's astronomy. God himself does not move. Being perfect, he has no need to change. But he causes other things to move. He is the Unmoved Mover. He is the supreme and perfect expression of intellect and reason, and the cause of all lesser manifestations of reason, both in the operations of nature and in the minds of men. Being perfect, he cannot entertain within himself any thought of imperfection. Now, although the whole universe aspires towards him, it is imperfect. He cannot therefore contemplate it. The divinely perfect Reason eternally contemplates the only object adequate to its attention – that is, Itself. Figuratively speaking, God has his back to the world. God is not personal for Aristotle; God is It and not He. God is Thought which eternally thinks itself.

Such a theology strikes us as strange. Indeed, the accommodating of Aristotle to Christianity by St Thomas Aquinas (1225-75) was a considerable *tour de force*. The God of both Plato and Aristotle was in fact an intellectual conception, the product of a rationalist thought seeking explanation. Both thought of him as the supreme and single explanatory principle which made all else intelligible. Asked why they called this principle God, they would probably have replied that this was what the word God as commonly used *must* really refer to if it had meaning. Moreover, they would have said that the Supreme Value which overall explanation demanded *must* be real. Being also the Supreme Reason, it was ultimately possible that man's reason, being of the same kind, could, exceptionally, reach some sort of union with It. Man could reach an exalted state of contemplation of the divine.

But note that it was contemplation, or looking at, not communion, which would suggest a reciprocity foreign to their thought. So here was not a God of religion. The Good or the Unmoved Mover could not be the object of worship or devotion. Their talk about God was therefore not in any way talk about a divine Person, who was active and unique. It was talk of a metaphysical conception which was perfect in a *static* way. If the aspiration for higher things was the complete explanation of all movement and change, then perfection itself could neither move nor change. Nor was it unique, in the sense of being 'singular', as that term was used in the last chapter; it was unique rather in all its generality and comprehensiveness, as holding within in itself the seeds of all things. God was not a person, but a thing. So talk of him was 'object' talk, of that which could be seen, or contemplated. Christianity was heir to philosophical language of this sort. As we shall see, it occasioned many difficulties and puzzles to those who first tried to use it to clothe the Christian gospel in philosophical dress; and some of their difficulties are still with us.[1]

God in the Hebrew tradition

In contrast to the Greek philosophical view, the Hebrews' God was a supreme person, whose name, Yahweh, was a personal name. His nature was known from what he did, and his purposes were known from what he said. It was in fact by his Word that he achieved his purposes. He created the world simply by speaking: 'God said, let there be light, and there was light.' He spoke his Word also directly to men – 'The word of the Lord came to the prophet, saying . . .' He was not static, but dynamic. If he was unchanging, it was with the steadfastness of the good man, rather than with the inertia of the gyroscope. Man's knowledge of Yahweh came by listening to, and obeying his Word, rather than by contemplating him.

The Hebrew's notion of obedience to his God, was not

[1] See Appendix II, p. 169f.

however, the submission of a slave but a dutiful and trustful response to a Person who has shown his real concern for a particular people – 'When Israel was a child,' the prophet Hosea represents him as saying, 'then I loved him: out of Egypt have I called my son' (Hosea 11:1). When Yahweh says, 'Thee only have I known of all the peoples of the earth' (Amos 3:2), he means knowledge of the most intimate and personal kind. The same word for 'know', for instance, is used of sexual relationship. Hebraic talk of God is then, talk of a personal kind, in a context of dutiful obedience to the righteous demands of a king, judge, father and shepherd of his people. It is the product of a religious community, worshipping under its leaders, whom God himself has chosen, and through whom his Word is interpreted.

For the Christians, Jesus was God's last Word. When man was helpless, having estranged himself from God by wilful disobedience, God became himself man, to effect a reconciliation. God took the initiative in restoring the personal relationship which he had proposed, not for the Hebrews only, but for all men. 'To know Christ is to know God' again. Christians claim to know him by hearing and obeying with the trustful commitment of children to their father. 'Hereby we know that we know him, if we keep his commandments' (1 John 2:3).

The religious language of the Hebrews, and of the early Christians, was not intellectualist, or a language of explanatory abstractions. It was grounded in personal experience of the nation and the individual's response to the demands of God. Among Christians, it was grounded in the experience of personal confrontation with God in Christ.

When Christianity spread, it was natural that a systematic and intellectual account of its beliefs should grow up. Intelligent believers, seeking to 'give answer to every man that asketh a reason concerning the hope' that was in them, began to ask how their knowledge of God in Christ, and their experience of him as they met him in their worship and devotions, could be summed up in statements which did not contradict one another. How do we fit in 'The Father is God', with 'Jesus is So

God'? How do we fit 'Jesus is God' to 'Jesus was a man'? Was the Father crucified? Is there still but one God? Was there a time when the Father had no Son, or when there was no Spirit? Attempts to answer these questions resulted in the growth, over several hundred years, of a body of statements, and definitions, which we call Christian Doctrine. Intellectual accounts of the gospel remained secondary to living it and proclaiming it while the experience of the indwelling Spirit remained the sole source of authority of a missionary Church. But when the Church became an established institution, the faith tended to become less centred in aspiration to the life of freedom 'in the Spirit', and more in assurance of right belief. Right belief was guaranteed by assent to statements of doctrine gathered in creeds. Their language was the metaphysical language of revealed theology.

Nevertheless, it was *because* doctrine referred ultimately to experience of God in Christ, that right belief was important. In the religions which Christianity supplanted, all that was important was right religious activity – the proper performance of cultic acts. But followers of the Christian Way sought Christ himself. The Way must be carefully sign-posted, to preserve the faithful from the attractive diversions of heretics.[1]

[1] Creeds were of three kinds. 1. Baptismal creeds. These were declarations made by converts at their baptism. Possibly the first was the simple assertion 'Jesus is Lord'. They grew, with the development of doctrine, passing it seems through a stage where the convert's faith was tested by a series of questions and answers. Our Apostles' Creed probably reached its present form in southern Gaul, sometime during the early eighth century.

2. Conciliar creeds. When a controversy arose on some doctrinal point, a general council of bishops was called together, and a considered statement was promulgated, usually in the form of additional clauses to existing credal statements. These creeds then became tests of 'orthodoxy', or right belief, binding on all bishops. Thus the Nicene Creed is associated with the council at Nicaea in 325, called to meet the crisis over the Arian heresy (p. 177). In fact, our Nicene Creed probably reached its present form in 381, at a Council in Constantinople.

3. Personal creeds. The Athanasian Creed, attributed to Athanasius, but probably composed by an unknown later follower of his, is an example of credal statements of individuals, a sort of doctrinal hymn, enlarging on existing definitions.

'Doctrine' means 'that which is taught'. Individual assertions which go to make up the body of doctrine are sometimes referred to as 'dogmas'. Dogma means 'a considered opinion'. Unfortunately, dogma and its adjective dogmatic have taken on emotional overtones hostile to traditional Christianity. Dogma is used of religious assertions with the suggestion that they are outmoded, irrelevant, and an obstacle to free enquiry. In origin it designates an agreed and carefully considered statement by the whole body of Christians, which is intended to set the verbal limits within which we can talk about our religious experience and claim also to be within the main stream of orthodox belief. These limits are in fact pretty wide. For instance, although all Christians will assent to the dogma that Jesus is the only begotten Son of God the Father, there have been a great variety of ways in which this assertion has been taken, and many different estimates of its reference and function.

Natural theology, and 'proofs' of God

At first Christians spurned traditional philosophy. 'What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?', asked Tertullian (*c.* 155-230). But the possibilities of Greek thought, especially Platonism, as vehicles of expression of Christian belief soon became apparent. The great truths of revelation are not inconsistent with reason; in fact, although God's nature as Father, Son and Spirit could be known only by revelation, the fact of God's existence could be the metaphysical key to our understanding of the whole world. Moreover, the existence of God as Christians conceived him, could, it was believed, be proved from our knowledge of the world. So in the Middle Ages there grew up, alongside revealed theology, what was known as natural theology.

Proofs of the existence of God were put forward by natural theology. They were of course proposed by believers, to show to themselves and to others that talking about God in the way revealed theology required was reasonable. In an age when the body of doctrine was unquestioned, or at least found no

philosophic or articulate objectors, the 'proofs' were significant merely as they fitted into a comprehensive world view which saw everything in nature, including man's reason, as both exemplifying God's benevolence and paying tribute to his majesty. But the break up of the medieval world view, and challenging and even rejection of the authority of the Church, made the support of belief by natural reason a thing of more consequence. It became increasingly pertinent to ask, 'Why do men believe in God?'

We will briefly consider the arguments for God in their two main forms, and also the objections which have been made to them.

Ontological argument

The Ontological argument was first clearly formulated by St Anselm (1033-1109), one of the great archbishops of Canterbury: it was also used by René Descartes (1596-1650) and by Leibnitz (1646-1716). In spite of seemingly fatal objections which can be made to it, under various guises it continues to appear. For it represents the attempt to break through from the conception of God to God himself; or, in the language of our earlier discussion, to make the 'God-encountering experience' deliver the certainty of God's existence.

'Ont' is from the participle of the Greek verb 'to be'. So 'ontological' means talking in terms of being as it is in itself, rather than in terms of the effects it produces. The argument begins with St Anselm's definition of God: 'God is a being a greater than which cannot be conceived.' Now, either (*a*) God exists, or (*b*) he does not exist. Suppose for the sake of argument (*b*) is the true alternative – God does not exist. This would not prevent us from thinking about a being who answers to our definition. So we think about a (non-existent) being with every quality to the greatest degree – goodness, love, power, and so on. But then suddenly we realise that we are not thinking about a being according to the definition, because we can conceive of one with one additional quality, namely, that of existence. The greatest being we can conceive

cannot be without this quality of existence, in addition to all its others. We realise, in fact, that alternative (*b*) has led us to a contradiction – the conception of a perfect being who lacks perfection. So alternative (*a*) *must* be true. In other words, either God exists, or he is a self-contradictory idea. He is not a self-contradictory idea. Therefore he exists.

Descartes adds that the existence of God is involved in his perfection in the same way that angles totalling 180° are involved in the idea of a triangle, and 'hill' is involved in the idea of 'valley'.

A monk called Gaunilo at once objected to St Anselm, 'I have an idea of the most perfect island that can be conceived. According to your argument, it must therefore exist.' St Anselm's reply was that his argument applied only to God, because only of God could it be said that existence was part of his essence. To understand this reply, and indeed the argument as a whole, we must notice the medieval distinction between 'essence' and 'existence'.

On the one hand there is the collection of qualities which make a thing what it is and nothing else. These can be identified as belonging together, irrespective of particular existent examples in which they occur. These qualities are the 'essence'. For instance, the 'essence' of 'horse' is the collection of qualities mammalian, quadruped, solid-hoofed, herbivorous, large, with flowing mane and tail. On the other hand there is the particular horse; in addition to the essential qualities, it has others, such as being a strawberry roan or a palamino, and of course it has existence. The same distinction applies to persons. We preserve it, in fact, in ordinary speech. We might say that the essence of a good frontier marshal was to be brave, resourceful, and quick on the draw. Jess Harper has these qualities, with others too, such as being quick tempered. But he lacks existence – he is a fictitious character. Bat Masterson has the same essence, and additional qualities; but in his case these include existence – he was an historical character. Now in the case of God, because he is perfect by definition, his essence contains *all* his qualities, including existence. Being the perfect being, existence *must* be part of this perfection, because,

given all his other qualities, a being with existence is better than a being without.

But it is clear – and this is the main objection to the ontological argument – that existence is not a quality like other qualities. I see in my mind's eye a pile of a hundred crisp new pound notes. Later, through the generosity of a benefactor, I see a pile of a hundred pound notes on the table before me. The essence now has existence. But has the pile any quality differing from the idea, purely in virtue of existence? None whatsoever. It is, however acceptable, still only £100. Or consider another example – a conversation at a police station. 'This dog you say you have lost,' says the desk sergeant, 'can you describe him?' 'Yes,' I say, 'he is a basset hound, long body, Queen Anne legs, long ears, thoughtful expression . . .' 'Is there anything else?' 'Why, yes,' I say, 'he exists.' If the sergeant is a logician he may reply, 'Forgive me saying so, sir, but existence is not a predicate, you know.' But if he is the ordinary shrewd sort of policeman he will make the same point by saying that this adds nothing to the description. He knows, for instance, that the C.I.D. do not add existence to an Identikit as they might add a moustache.

The objection is a valid one. But notice the context in which St Anselm produces this argument – it is not in a work of philosophy, but in a book of meditation, called the *Proslogion*. He is in fact trying to express in the language of philosophy something which he feels deeply. He realises that as a man he is pitifully dependent on things and other people; he is aware of his own inner being as, in spite of all his aspirations, ineffectual. Pondering this as a Christian, he sees that dependence and ineffectiveness can themselves point to God – God is God because he is dependent on nothing and is fully effective in all he does. The chief splendour of his Being, St Anselm is saying, is that absolutely and effectively and independently, he *is*. This is the unique nature of absolute perfection.

St Anselm's self-awareness in contemplation brings with itself a moment of disclosure. He looks through and beyond the limitations of his terrestrial being, to its ground in the divine Being, which alone makes his condition tolerable. This is not

solely, be it said, the disclosure of a pattern, or the opting for a viewpoint, although these are involved. His human experience is only intelligible to him, if what is normally opaque has become momentarily transparent; if at the end of the perspective of human finitude he has seen infinite Divinity. The *meaning* of the experience for him is not that there has been the disclosure of an explanatory concept to be appropriately labelled God. It is that there has been a disclosure of God Himself.

Cosmological argument

People of Plato's, and St Anselm's, temperament tend to look at life from the inside, considering what it *feels like* to be a creature. Within themselves they experience creaturely dependence. Those, like Aristotle, of more scientific temper, prefer to look at life from the outside, seeing what it *looks like* to be a creature. The world which we see is only intelligible in terms of creaturely dependence. The world which we see points in fact to a Creator. Their actual argument is called the Cosmological. 'Cosmos' is an adjective meaning orderly, and so, as a noun, means the world, or the universe, because it appears orderly. Cosmological therefore means 'talking in terms of the orderliness of the world'.

The argument has several forms, all reducible to this: Everything in nature owes its existence to something else, which caused it. Everything is dependent. Eggs depend on hens, hens on other eggs, and these on yet other hens. Rivers depend on streams, streams on springs, springs on rain . . . and so on. This dependence is called 'cause and effect'. Every cause is itself the effect of an earlier cause. Somewhere, way back, there must be a cause which started the whole thing, and which was not itself the effect of another cause; in fact, an Uncaused Cause, or First Cause. And this we call God.

The most influential backer of this argument was St Thomas Aquinas, whose life's work was the adaptation of Aristotle's metaphysic to Christianity, in a great systematic world view which came to be known as Thomism. As Neo-Thomism, this

metaphysic still has considerable influence, as expounded by men like Maritain in France, and Dr E. L. Mascall in this country.

To understand the objections to this argument, we must first consider the critical examination of our idea of cause and effect, first put forward by the Scottish philosopher David Hume (1711-1776). On a billiard table, a white ball is moving. It hits a red ball. Now the red is moving. Down into the pocket it goes. We say, 'The cue ball gave the red a gentle push'. We are thinking of our own sensation, of course, when our feeling of 'wanting to' passed from brain to hand, and we gave the white ball a gentle push with the cue. But did we actually see the white 'give' the red anything? No. What did we see? We saw the white moving; then we saw its conjunction with the red; then we saw the red moving to the pocket. The game of billiards depends on this regular succession of events – the same 'before' and 'after'. Every time I make the cue ball move in this particular way, immediately afterwards the red ball moves in that particular way. We say that the white ball 'caused' the red ball to move. All that we saw was one movement followed by another movement. We depend on this sort of regularity of succeeding events, in our experience of every sort of object. 'A large body attracts a small body', says our law of gravitation. 'Attracts' is obviously a metaphor; we might modify this to 'A large body causes a small body to move towards it'. What do we actually see? A large body and a small body – the small body is moving – in any particular direction? yes, towards the large body. This is what we always see happen.

And this is what we mean by causation – simply that event A has always been observed to be followed by event B. We use this regular conjunction of events to explain all the things or events within the universe which we do explain. When we ask, 'What caused B?' we are asking what is the A which events like B have always been observed to follow. But we cannot ask, 'What caused the universe?' The universe is all that there is, there can be no regularly observed preceding event. In fact our question is not a real question. We are being misled by

the fact that it is in the same grammatical form as real questions about 'causes'.

The objection to the cosmological argument is, then, that we cannot use the word cause legitimately except in the case of a regularly observed antecedent to an effect. If we do use it of God, saying that God caused the universe, in the same sense as we would say that the rain caused a flood, we are making of him simply an event in the world. We may, however, say that when we speak of God as 'cause' we are using the word in a special way; somehow like its ordinary use, but special as being appropriate only to him. This may indeed be a legitimate use, as we shall see. But then we are not proving that God exists; we are assuming that God exists, and using the idea of cause and effect as an illustration of the sort of relationship that he may have to the universe.

Naturally enough, it has also been objected to this particular form of the argument that there is no reason to suppose that the cause-and-effect series ever had a beginning – perhaps it has been going on for ever. There is nothing contrary to reason in supposing that it is infinite. But the argument is not really affected by this, because what it is saying, fundamentally, is that a universe of dependent and impermanent things is not self-explanatory, whether it is infinite or not. It is only intelligible if we suppose there to be a Being responsible for it, who is not dependent and who is unchanging.

Two words from traditional philosophy express this contrast: 'contingent' and 'necessary'. I have used the word 'dependent' for contingent, so far. Contingent is used for a thing which just happens to be. A sunflower grows in my garden, because a seed happened to fall from the hamster's cage, and germinated. The essence of sunflower happened to find existence in this particular place. But it might have fallen on the path; and there would be no eyebrows raised at the statement, 'No sunflower grows in my garden'. Everything in the universe is contingent in the same way, from stars to amoeba. How can we account for all this diversity of interdependent beings, this infinite patterning and complexity of relationships of beings which are nevertheless contingent? Only, it is argued,

by a Being who is not contingent, but necessary. That is, a Being who has existence without any dependence or chance, a Being who exists simply in virtue of what he is, whose nature is such that he cannot but *be* – in other words, whose essence *is* to exist.

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), having, as he supposed, his own certain grounds for belief in God, rejected both ontological and cosmological arguments. In doing so, he made the point that the cosmological is really only a special case of the ontological. The truth of this may perhaps have appeared from the way I have presented them. Both those who start from inner experience and those who start from outward observation end by claiming the existence of a necessary being as the only possible explanation of contingent being. As proofs, these arguments, and their variants, fail. Some have said that although individually they are not conclusive, collectively they make God's existence highly probable. It is difficult to see, however, how any number of arguments which are individually false, can collectively be anything but false.

But perhaps this is not all that there is to be said. Do they in fact achieve anything? The ontological argument and the criticism which it provokes perform the useful task of clarifying the nature of metaphysical thinking. The argument fails because, in terms of contemporary criticism, it makes 'God exists' a statement which is analytical and synthetic at the same time. It is self-evident, and also a statement of fact; in other words, at one and the same time it is an assertion which cannot be challenged, and a statement which must be challenged. We are thereby reminded that religious and metaphysical language is not based on the scientific model. It does not make statements which are explanatory hypotheses resting on evidence. Nor is it concerned with self-evident truths to which proofs of the mathematical sort are appropriate. We see, in fact, the error of rationalist philosophers, who, like Descartes, thought they could make metaphysics both scientific and certain by building up from fundamental axioms which are both factual and self-evident. But beside this subsidiary benefit, how do the proofs help us in our enquiry?

The singularity of God

We have already noted that these arguments are put forward by believers in God. 'God exists' is offered as a conclusion. But it is not a discovery to which impartial investigation led. It was in fact assumed from the start. What the arguments are really saying is, 'This is how it feels to be a person, if you believe in God', or, 'This is the way the world looks if you believe in God'. Christians claim that the central fact of their faith is the experience of God in Christ, and that all can share this experience. They conceive it to be their duty to communicate it – all Christians are missionaries. Techniques of communication differ for different people – young, old, simple, clever. But all have the same purpose, to build a picture, to tell a story, perhaps, in such a way that sooner or later there comes a disclosure, a moment of insight: 'Look at it this way . . .' leads eventually to 'Ah yes, now I see'. The 'proofs' are specialised techniques – mission sermons, as it were, addressed to argumentative people.

But the disclosure is not simply of a pattern. They point beyond the pattern to God, as presiding over it. They do not make his existence an intellectual certainty. But they put people into the way of the sort of experience in which God may be encountered. St Anselm's mistake was that of attempting to display this encounter in the language of logical demonstration. What his failure succeeded in doing was to point to the fact that God is not approached only by thinking. Reality is not something which corresponds simply to our highest thought. It is not wholly conceptual. It is something more akin to our deepest feeling, our awareness of our own being. So God is not a Being to which thought of the most rigorous kind will inevitably lead us: the truly Real is not something towards which we argue and reason until we arrive at the perfect abstraction, which thereupon comes, so to speak, suddenly to life. The endeavour to reach God in this way must fail for the same reason that Joan fails to 'conceptualise' her love for John. Reality is given in our personal experience of being ourselves in relation to other selves, and for Christians this

involves the awareness, which comes in worship and devotion, of a self who is supreme and perfect. The task of reason is to comment on our experience of the real: not to create reality. 'I do not seek to understand in order that I may believe,' says St Anselm elsewhere, 'but I believe in order that I may understand.'

St Anselm stands for the approach to God which is not intellectualist. His view is opposed, for instance, to the God who is Thought of thought, the Pure Form, of Aristotle, St Anselm's God is the God of Christian worship and Christian experience. He is the God of the Bible, who is known, in the personalist Hebrew sense, through what he has done.

We have now reached the point where we can see what is fundamental to the Christian viewpoint. The key feature which I put forward as essential to the believer's understanding is Singularity. Christian philosophy is a philosophy of the singular. In talking of the claims made for man as soul, singularity was used to describe the uniqueness of the individual as he is known by other individuals. The uniqueness of individuals is an empirical fact, and it is this empirical fact which furnishes the clue to the uniqueness of God. In other words, talk about the ultimately Real as personal and singular has an empirical basis in talk about men and women as personal and singular. At the same time, the claim to experience God as singular, the Godward facing view of the world, so to say, is what gives to the singularity of man its vital importance. It is because God is truly real, and is singular, that the singularity of each individual man becomes the most important thing about him.

Our problem now becomes – and this is the central problem of Christian thought – how can we talk intelligibly about the singular? For, as we saw, singularity is simply that which defies description because it defies classification. How does Joan indicate the singularity for which she loves John, over and above all his classifiable qualities? 'My John' – in other words by a proper name. So we indicate the absolute singular by a word which performs the office of a proper name – 'God'. If someone asks, 'Who is this John?' we can, through Joan,

arrange an introduction. We cannot claim that God's singularity is empirical in the same way that John's is. But we do claim, with St Anselm, that it is an absolute singularity, a Name which is above every name: the Name which guarantees all other proper names. In other words, it gives to human singularity expressed by human names, the centrality in our experience which we feel it must have.

We are embarked, then, on the seemingly impossible task of justifying talk about a reality which is not only singular, but also transcends our finite experience. We will begin by examining the ways of talking about human singularity which are felt to be appropriate and meaningful.

Analogy, paradox, and story

First there is the use of analogy. The use of analogy in metaphysics must be distinguished from the other meaning of the word – the 'argument by analogy'. This says that if A and B have the qualities a, b, c, d, and C has the qualities a, b, and c, then it is probable that C has also the property d. ('Jones and Smith were single, adaptable, hardworking, both went to Canada; both made fortunes. Brown is single, adaptable, hardworking; he has now gone to Canada. So he will probably make a fortune too.) Metaphysical analogy is of a different sort. We notice first the three ways in which the same descriptive word may be used.

(*a*) In the sentences, 'The carpet is green' and 'The curtains are green', the word green has just the same meaning. This is 'univocal' use.

(*b*) In the sentence 'The timber is green' the word has no reference to colour, only the sound is the same. This is 'equivocal' use.

(*c*) If, on the other hand, I say, 'Tom must have been very green to have been taken in', I am using the word green very differently from its application to timber: but there is a connection. We are directed to think of Tom as being pliable and immature like new wood. Tom is green, but in a way appropriate to ingenuous young men rather than timber. This is

'analogical' use. (It will be noticed that 'pliable' is another case of analogical use. In fact the analogical use of words of description is so common that we take it for granted, and we realise their appropriateness when we see how they are applied. But we have to know the things to which they are applied, to see just what they convey. Nevertheless, *some* idea of an unknown object can be conveyed by analogical description – we are at least assured of looking in the right direction.)

'Analogy' of this sort may be used by Joan in telling us about John. 'George is clever. Is your John?' 'Yes, of course he is, very clever. But he is no smart Alec like George.' 'Fred is handsome. Is John?' 'Yes, he has fine features. Not handsome in a flashy way like Fred, though.' Every quality which you instance, and ask Joan about, she will admit to being appropriate to John, but in a quite distinctive way. His cleverness is a cleverness quite bereft of all the ways in which we think of George as being clever. His handsomeness is vastly different from Fred's. He is handsome, clever, kind, sympathetic, gentle – all these are quite appropriate things to say of him, provided we are careful to think of them without all the unfortunate limitations which mar these qualities in other young men we know. The words are pointers to John's unique excellence, no more.

Second, there is the use of paradox. A paradox is bringing together of apparently contradictory terms to startle us into an awareness of novelty. G. K. Chesterton used paradox as the basis of his literary style. Outside of writing to entertain, he found this figure of speech most apt in his serious preoccupation with the defence of the Christian faith. When he describes the painter Stothard as 'an instance of the highly cultivated and utterly ignorant man', he startles us by suggesting that to be cultivated and to be ignorant are not inconsistent. The painter had a highly refined technique, but a very shallow understanding of the nature of the things he painted. So 'he who alone could draw them right was especially likely to see them wrong. . . . His whole business was somehow or other to make pictures: and therefore when he looked at Chaucer, he could see nothing but the picturesque.'

Often quoted in history books is the description of James I as 'the wisest fool in Christendom'. This does not mean that in some matters he was very wise and in others very foolish: it means that his was a real wisdom, but of its very nature it produced, in that time and place, foolish attitudes and acts – and notice that this latter 'explanation' does not really do full justice to the paradox. The significant thing about the best paradox is that no other explanation can quite catch its meaning. An excellent example of this is Lord Granville's description of a Russian princess whom he knew in Moscow – 'So easy, so grande dame, so clever, so insolent, so civil.'[1] This does not mean that she was a lady of uncertain mood, who was sometimes friendly, sometimes haughty; sometimes offensive and sometimes gracious. It in fact brilliantly portrays, as uniquely experienced in personal relationship, a personality which was at one and the same time able to combine friendliness and warmth with aristocratic dignity. Again, all ordinary descriptions fall short, by overemphasising this or that quality; whereas the paradox simply places its contradictory adjectives side by side. It will be seen that analogy and paradox are closely allied, in that both achieve their effect by contradiction, by both asserting and denying the same sort of quality at the same time.

The third method of communicating the singular is by telling a story. Stories are about people – people engaged in interesting events. By the way situations affect them, and by the way they influence situations, they are built up before us as recognisable characters – people in whom we can believe, with whom we can sympathise, and whom we can claim to know. The greatness of a novelist or dramatist lies in his ability to create characters who have the uniqueness of real men and women – and he does this not by describing them, but by showing them in action. The poorer sort of modern hero of fiction or television is defective in just this quality of uniqueness. We find dull, predictable dramatic units engaging in an endless round of trivial events which are scandalous or romantic, or both. There are exceptions, such as the characterisation in the

[1] Quoted by L. V. Langmead Casserley, *The Christian in Philosophy*, p. 180.

Maigret stories, and in Raymond Chandler's Philip Marlowe. Chandler never describes Marlowe: yet from all the crime and violence and frustration, a real and even enigmatic character emerges, who can engage our interest in a way that James Bond never does. It is the mark of the great dramatic creation that not only do we recognise and accept uniqueness of character, but its very singularity passes beyond critical analysis. There is no limit to the interpretations of the character of Hamlet by actors and critics. No critic can give an exhaustive account of him: there remains always something more to be said.

It even sometimes happens that an author creates a character of such striking realism and individuality, that he does not himself fully appreciate some aspects apparent to the reader. Thomas Hardy, for instance, created, with true insight, tragic characters like Tess with complete realism. But because he was too much occupied with his notion of hostile powers destroying people, we can understand her in ways he refused to. We can even argue from his characters against his theory.

In fact, we may say that the great figures of dramatic creation are, like great historical figures, controversial. People will go on arguing about them, presenting personal interpretations, portraits some widely different in emphasis, others wholly incompatible. The great man turns out to be a mass of contradictions – the brilliant Alexander, with his vision of a world civilisation, who could yet be described as combining the ferocity of a highland chief with the unscrupulousness of an oriental despot; the great leader of a people, whose achievements can be interpreted as those of competent subordinates, so that he himself is left only with his failures: or the national figure whose benign and fatherly public image is in sharp contrast to the irascible and lecherous dotard whose family find him so difficult. It is in fact the contradictions in characters which give real life to great story – Macbeth the brave and loyal captain who is also Macbeth the murderer and usurper. Contradiction is part of the nature of singularity; and so we come back to paradox.

Evocative techniques

Human singularity is communicated by analogy, by paradox, and by dramatic narrative. We must now try to see how theological language uses these techniques in its attempts to communicate the nature of the singularity of God.

When Joan uses various qualities as pointers to John's special version of them, though we may not have met him, we accept the fact of there being such a person, forming an idea, for instance, of a certain refinement in his good looks, and depth rather than superficiality in his intellectual powers. So a fundamental assumption of the analogical description of God is the fact of his existence. But his complete otherness from every other sort of existent so impressed some philosophers, that, whatever we may properly say about him as he appears to men through biblical narrative, there is nothing that we can say of him as he is in himself. Hence what is called the 'Negative Way', saying what God is not, rather than what he is. Thus, Clement of Alexandria (d. 213): 'The One is without form and name . . . but for want, we use names, in order that the mind may have these points of support. . . . For predicates are expressed either from what belongs to things themselves, or from their mutual relation. But none of these is admissible in reference to God. Nor is he apprehended by the science of demonstration. For demonstration depends on primary and better known principles. But there is nothing antecedent to the Unbegotten.' (*Stromateis* 5, 11.) So St Augustine of Hippo (354-430), who by no means confines himself to this negative approach, nevertheless expresses it clearly when he says, 'There is in the mind no knowledge of God except the knowledge of how it does not know him.' (*De Ordine* II, 18:47.)

But if God is our Creator and Saviour, we must be able somehow to affirm something of him in terms of our earthly life. For this is the only way open to us of commending to others the nature of Christian experience. It is by everyday experience presented in a special way that we can hope to evoke in others a disclosure, whereby they will see things in

the same perspective as we do as believers. We see God, in fact, at the end of every perspective. So situations of goodness, say, or of power, or of justice in the human sphere, we use as pointers to the nature of God. Of course in him they are very different; we cannot say precisely how they are with him. But we can say that the perspective of goodness, for instance, in its varying human degrees, is at least the right *direction* in which to look for him.

Application of these techniques to the 'proofs'

Consider how these analogical and evocative techniques work by the following illustration.[1] On a remote planet there lives a people with a curiously undeveloped geometry which is completely without curves. How can the existence of a circle be brought home to them? 'Draw a regular polygon,' says the astronaut in charge of education. 'Now add a side. Now add another . . . now another,' and so on. Sooner or later there comes to the brighter pupils a point of disclosure. In a flash of insight they will see whither the process of adding sides is tending – towards a new kind of figure altogether, which their polygons are always more nearly approaching, but which of course they will never reach – the circle. 'By a circle, then,' says the instructor, 'I mean an Infinite Polygon.' Of course, a circle is completely different from a polygon, and behaves, geometrically, in quite a different way. But looking along the perspective of ever-growing polygons, we see 'polygon' is appropriately used of a circle *analogically*. We qualify 'polygon' at once with the word 'infinite' to show its otherness. The circle is recognised as relevant to growing polygons, presiding over and containing the whole series.

In the same way we say that 2 is the 'infinite sum' of the series $1+\frac{1}{2}$, $1+\frac{1}{2}+\frac{1}{2}^2$, $1+\frac{1}{2}+\frac{1}{2}^2+\frac{1}{2}^3$, $1+\frac{1}{2}+\frac{1}{2}^2+\frac{1}{2}^3+\frac{1}{2}^4$ . . . etc. 2 stands to the series as the circle stands to the polygons. A circle is an infinite polygon, 2 is an infinite sum . . . and God is infinite goodness.

[1] For this and the following illustration I am indebted to Prof. I. T. Ramsey's *Religious Language*, p. 69.

Tom is sometimes good, Jane is usually good, Mary is always good . . . very good . . . saintly. So, looking along the perspective of increasing degrees of goodness, there comes at some point the disclosure of an infinite sum of goodness, and this we call God. The goodness of God is what makes all earthly examples of partial goodness intelligible. It gives them a place in a series over which God presides. All human qualities and actions by which we set store, can be arranged in such progressive perspectives, to point towards God as their infinite sum. In a way, all these techniques which draw upon human and evaluative situations are summed up in the ontological argument, which places God at the end of the perspective of personal being, and awareness of my personal being in relationship with others. I am in relationship with many different persons whose singularity is expressed by different names and titles. I like Tom, admire the Principal, respect the Mayor, honour the Queen – a series ending in the supreme Proper Name and Title, to whom my commitment in terms of loving esteem is unlimited.

In the cosmological argument, the technique is applied to things rather than to persons, in the various relationships which we observe them to have to one another – in the case we considered, that of cause and effect. We go on accounting for things by stories of cause and effect, working back through causes more and more comprehensive, until there is a disclosure of God as cause, presiding over the whole proceeding. But of course he is not a member of the series: we are not sure that we can be speaking precisely when we call him a cause – we are using the term analogically. So we qualify 'cause' with 'first'. Thus the analogy is modified to show that he is outside the series; that we do not know fully what we mean when we apply 'cause' to God, but we do know that we can see him as the fully comprehensive and adequate ground for anything happening at all.

All the synonyms for God, such as First Cause, Unmoved Mover, Absolute Being, Infinite Goodness, Infinite Love, are paradoxical: the second term indicates the method that has been used to approach God, and the first term contradicts it

in order to show its analogical character as applied to him. For the believer, all pathways through human experience lead to God. These pathways converge on the Singular Being from directions as various as human experience itself. It is not surprising that they lead to apparent contradictions. As approached along the pathway of motions or of causes, he is the Unmoved Mover, or the Uncaused Cause. Yet, approached along the pathway of increasing resistance to arbitrariness and to fortuitous change, he is the Unchanging, the Impassible. He is Infinitely Just; he is Infinitely Merciful. He is Wrath, he is Love. Once men were prepared to rest in eternal contradiction – polytheism made reality itself contradictory, by seeing Love and Wrath, Justice and Mercy as different gods. Our account of the apparent contradiction in the nature of human singularity is a pointer to the fact that within the supreme Singular these contradictions are resolved. This is the mystery of his singularity: paradox is its proper verbal expression.

A triangle and a rectangle are different, and even contradictory, in the sense that in plane geometry, one figure cannot be both. But a ridge tent can be both – approached from the side it is a rectangle, and approached from the end it is a triangle. Develop this parable, and consider a great mountain, remote and unexplored. Travellers see it from afar and from different viewpoints. Some see it as triangular, for others its silhouette is rectangular; others again report other shapes. Stories get back to the settlements with detail so diverse, that a number of different peaks seems a reasonable hypothesis. More travellers bring back more tales; new angles, new outlines are vouched for. And suddenly, on some frontiersman the truth dawns – aided perhaps by his tent, as Newton was by his apple – that a great number of seemingly incompatible tales *could* be true of one and the same mountain. Not all of the tales seem quite to fit in, of course – that will have to await a real survey: and of course the possible points of view are infinite. But long before the full tale is told, a single great mountain can be seen to accord with these contradictory accounts which at first seem so puzzling.

So it is with the being of God, immense in its singularity,

within which apparent contradiction is resolved beyond our present knowing. But we believe that within the limits of our knowledge we do know him as singular, and we can speak of him in ways which are appropriate. By paradox we both assert and deny – we assert that a particular image or analogy is really descriptive and revealing because it points in the right direction, and we deny that in him the analogy or image has the limitations which it inevitably has in our human experience.

'It becomes our duty to envisage God,' says St Augustine, 'if we can, and so far as we can, as good without quality, great without quantity, creator without necessity, foremost without relations, comprehending all things but possessing no mode of existence, everywhere present but without location, eternal without subjection to time, capable of action without submitting to the changes of temporal things, and of feeling without passion. Whoever thus thinks of God, although he is by no means able to discover him, nevertheless takes such precautions as are possible against entertaining false notions of him.' (*De Trinitate* V, 1:3.)

6

The Trinity

'*Heilsgeschichte*'

We examined ways in which the singular could be talked about, identifying analogy, paradox and narrative. We considered their interrelation, and saw how the first two were used in religious language. The full Christian doctrine of God is rooted in the third.

The Christian scriptures embody the narrative which displays the singularity of God. The Old Testament describes the events through which the ancient Hebrews claimed that God was acting. The Old Testament is a unity in that although written by many authors with diverse backgrounds and attitudes, there is a fundamental agreement that what has happened in the history of the Hebrew people can only be understood in terms of a God who is a person, showing his love and concern – his moral as well as his ritual requirements, his approval and disapproval – in personal ways. As their history moves from the area of myth, folklore and legend, we are confronted with what they regarded as his supreme saving act – the deliverance from Egypt. Extraordinary events are said to have attended this deliverance. Whatever may be said of the nature of these events in other spheres of discourse, to the Hebrews they were seen as characteristically personal situations, situations in which God was taking the initiative, and becoming real as a Person whose intention and regard was especially towards them. He disclosed himself, and he demanded a response to this disclosure. Following the signs of God's choice, and the evidence of his power, there was a response of commitment by their leader Moses, in the name of the whole people, concluded in a formal agreement or

covenant, and sealed by cultic rites. This complex of saving events and transactions with God became the established centre and point of reference for the nation's subsequent religious life. It provided the norm of imagery and language of God's traffic with his people, in later crises, and in later revelations of himself.

Thus, the near presence of God was betokened by cloud on a mountain, and by the visible light of his glory (known as the *shekinah*). His Word was uttered by the *bath-qol*, which means, literally, 'the daughter of a voice'. Hearing of the word involved a covenant relationship, sealed in blood. This imagery carries over into the New Testament and is used in the description of the 'transfiguration' of Jesus; Jesus also uses it at the Last Supper.

The New Testament is in part a record of events of the life of Jesus, and reflections on these events. It claims that he is the decisive and complete self-revelation of God. Jesus is at one and the same time God eternal, and also a man, whom other men could know and love on earth. He is the assurance that the ultimate singular is personal. Personal relationship with him is possible for all men. The New Testament bears witness to the fact of such a relationship, both during his earthly life, and after it. The realisation of this relationship absorbs those who experience it in a remarkable way, so that they describe it as introducing them to an entirely new and different sort of life. We may recall what was said about intimate relationships between human persons, how love may be said to 'bring to life' all that is uniquely personal; how we can only truly become our full selves in our relationship to other selves; and how we make one another what we are. Now if one party to this relationship is the Son of God himself, then the self-realisation which it brings us is in terms of the divine life. Human love realises singularity in union. Love between man and Christ is a union with one end resting, as it were in the Eternal Singular. In a sense, and in a way limited by our humanity, it is a sharing of the life of God. This is what the New Testament claims has been a reality for certain men and women; and it is God's purpose through

Jesus to present the same possibility to all men of all ages.

It is in the light of this conviction that the narratives of the life of Jesus, which we call the Gospels, were written. The Gospels are not biographies of Christ, but portraits of him in terms of the events in which he was involved. Of course the events recorded are interpreted, and they are selected from all that happened with a view to making clear the writers' understanding of all that happened. But the actual events are insisted on as being historical. The Christian gospel is ultimately a narrative of events understood to be acts of God, through which he reveals himself, and saves man. There is no single word in English which does justice to the New Testament's unity of presentation of its theme. But there is in German, and that is *Heilsgeschichte*, which means 'story of salvation'.

Jesus, human and divine

In the Gospels there are preserved realistic memories of the humanity of Jesus. Like other men, he grew hungry, or tired. Like other men, he experienced disappointment and pain, he displayed surprise, and occasionally anger. But the narrative detail serves to express the tremendous impact of his personality on those who knew him. The intimate and familiar friend could also somehow inspire reverential awe. The brief picture of Mark 10:32 shows this most clearly. On the last journey to Jerusalem, Jesus strides on before the little band: 'and Jesus was going on before them: and they were amazed; and they that followed were afraid.' There is no further comment or explanation – none is needed. Here we are confronted with the experience of an eye-witness. He records an imperishable moment in which, through the beloved Humanity, the glory and mystery of the Divinity was seen to blaze.

To the expression of the latter, the New Testament writers bring the whole wealth and range of Hebraic religious imagery and symbolism. Jesus is a second Moses, he is Elijah, he is the king like David, the Son of David, the Son of God. He is the great High Priest. He is also the sacrificial victim, the Lamb

of God. He is King; and he is also the Servant of God. Because the purport of this sort of imagery is not apparent to the ordinary reader, its force is sometimes lost. Indeed, there have been those who have denied the divinity of Jesus on the ground that the New Testament does not specifically claim it. But behind many of the sayings of Jesus, and much of the gospel narrative lie figures of speech familiar to the Jews, and quite unambiguous in their claims. Consider, for instance, the well-known saying, 'I am the good shepherd'. To the western mind, this suggests the Eastern shepherd, leading his flock, with overtones of gentleness and compassion, owing a good deal to Sunday school illustrations and nursery sentiment about lambs. But turn back to the Old Testament. A nation's rulers were spoken of metaphorically as 'shepherds'. There could be bad shepherds. Ezekiel contrasts the bad shepherds of his day, with the Davidic prince who will rule over a restored Israel. He will be a 'good shepherd' – '. . . he shall feed them, even my servant David; he shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd'. (Ezekiel 34: 23.) So the redeemer in Isaiah is the 'messianic shepherd' (Isaiah 40: 11). This messiah-shepherd-king is idealised as he 'that shall come in the end of the world' II Esdras 2: 34). Moreover, in the ancient near east, divinity and monarchy were closely linked – indeed, among some peoples there was virtual identity, the king being an incarnation of the national deity. It is doubtful whether the Hebrews even in the earlier stages of their religious development went quite so far as this; but at any rate the association was very close, and because the king was thought of as the vicegerent of Yahweh, there was no impropriety in applying to him the same metaphors. The king was a Shepherd-ruler because Yahweh was the Shepherd whose flock was Israel. The psalms are rich in allusion to this theme (e.g. Psalms 23, 78: 52, 80: 1, 95: 7, etc.).

Further, there is special significance in 'I am . . .' in the seven sayings of Jesus in St John's gospel which begin in this way. There can be little doubt that behind this emphatic 'I am' lies a reminiscence of Exodus 3: 13-14, in which Moses asks what is the name of the deity who is sending him to the

Israelites. 'And God said unto Moses, I am that I am: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.'

So when Jesus said 'I am the good shepherd', he was making the quite unambiguous claim to be the Messianic redeemer of Israel, the divinely appointed King of his people; and he is using language associated with the authority of God himself. Either he is making a true claim, or he is guilty of the gravest blasphemy. There is no room, then, for the view of Jesus as simply a great, or even the greatest, religious leader, the supreme revealer of God. Either we take him at his own, and the New Testament's evaluation, or we reject him as at best deluded, at worst a messianic pretender like Bar Cochba and others of his time.

Jesus and the Spirit

When Jesus was no longer with his friends, they were aware that their relationship with him had not ceased. The handful of followers suddenly appear as dedicated and fearless propagandists. 'Boldness' is a recurrent word in the story of their early enterprises. It was a boldness bred of the certainty that Jesus' love, his power, his authority, were still with them. *He* was with them still in a personal way. They came to speak of this continuing divine presence as Jesus' Spirit, or God's Spirit. Both terms are used of God acting personally in the Church. But the Son and the Spirit are used to distinguish two different kinds of operation. God operates through Jesus, but he also operates through the Spirit. 'The one true God of the old Jewish faith, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, had now acted in a new way: what was involved was not (so to speak) an enlargement of God, but an enlargement of man's revealed knowledge of God – not the taking of two other "persons" into the divine society, but the revelation of God's different ways of being God, now understood . . . for the first time.' (Alan Richardson, *Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament*, p. 122.)

The biblical narrative of the singular is a narrative of en-

counter with a divine person acting towards man in three distinctive ways. The problem we have to consider is that the Christian doctrine of God says much more than this. The doctrine of the Trinity is of three persons in the one God. God is singular. Christ is singular. The Spirit is singular. But there are not three singulars, but one singular. This is paradox indeed.

There is no clearly formulated doctrine of the Trinity in the New Testament. But we nevertheless find in it the data on which the later doctrine rests. Trinitarian doxologies and formulae (for instance Matthew 28: 10-19, II Corinthians 1: 21f., 13: 14, I Peter 1: 2) show that the divine object of the worship and of the thought of the Church of the Apostles was somehow more than the one God. More, that is, in the sense that he was one God, of whom 'son' and 'spirit' were simply aspects, or modes of his different sorts of actions. Father, Son, and Spirit are spoken of, and invoked, side by side. The metaphor – or analogy – of Father and Son, which was from the first appropriate to the relationship between Jesus and the God of Abraham, goes beyond the suggestion that he is no more than an aspect of God. It suggests a distinct personal being, sharing God's divinity, but inheriting his divine quality. Otherwise, for instance, it would have to be said that God the Father was crucified. To use the simplest metaphor, God was still 'in heaven' when Jesus was on the cross. Nevertheless, it is never hinted that the activity of the Son is in any way less than the fullest activity of the divine being. 'God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself.'

Similarly, the Spirit, spoken of both as the Spirit of God, and as the Spirit of His Son involves the full activity of both. But there is again a distinction between Christ 'at the right hand of God' after the Ascension, and Christ operating through the Spirit here on earth and in the Church. The Spirit's activities are characteristic – He is the revealer of the true meaning of Christ, and the teacher of the Church. (John 14: 25, 26; 15: 26; 16: 7-15.) He is the 'Paraclete'. This term originates from legal language where it means 'counsel for the defence', but as used by St John, it takes on the special meaning in religious

language of exhortation, or prophetic declaration, combined with consolation, especially the consolation which the Messiah's age offers to the 'poor in spirit' (i.e. those who have remained faithful through an age of persecution, the spiritually underprivileged).

Trinity in unity

This then is the apparently irreducible paradox which the New Testament offers – the trinity in unity. For nearly five hundred years the Church wrestled with the intellectual problems which it raises. The unity of God must be safeguarded; yet the distinctiveness of the three must be preserved. Insistence on the Oneness seemed to involve the denial of the Three; the assertion of the Three seemed to involve three gods. No less puzzling was the relation of Christ's divine nature to his human nature.

Recall what was said about the conditions for the realisation of human singularity. Human singulars come to be what they are through dynamic relationship with others. Man as singular is a unique centre of freely willed attitudes, intentions, and activities. This uniqueness only comes out and develops to its distinctive fullness when the man is committed to other unique centres, or singulars. Commitment to, and involvement with others, is love. The doctrine of the Trinity claims that the singularity of God is realised in the same way. He is what he is in virtue of personal relationship of love. In the notion of his singularity is involved the dynamic relationship of persons. But God was and is God quite apart from anything within the universe, anything which he has created. He is prior to the universe. He is separate from, and independent of, anything outside of himself. This is what we mean when we say that he is Absolute. If, therefore, personal relationship is necessary to the realisation of singularity, this relationship must have been active eternally *within* the being of God. So we speak of three eternal Persons within the Godhead. The Father, Son, and Spirit are through eternity in dynamic relationship with one another. They are not just

aspects of God as we see him, or differing ways in which he operates. They are real entities such that they can have real relationship with one another. But this relationship of persons within God does not make three Gods. The paradox, or mystery, is that they together make one God; there are not three singulars, but three singulars which are one Singular.

Trinity in unity is not itself wholly outside of human experience. Although we cannot speak of God as he is, we can at least cast around for analogies which seem to be appropriate. We will find in ordinary experience models which will at least help to throw some light on the mystery. These models will inevitably be limited in one way or another. The disputes of early Christian theology were partially due to a failure to realise what were the limitations of the models which were to hand – a failure, in fact, to grasp the analogical nature of terms like Father and Son.

Some relevant models

Oneness which is also a multiplicity is a common feature of experience. A number of bricks, which may be counted, together form one pile of bricks. A more complicated unity is that of a machine. Its unity is something more than that of a pile of components. It does not become a machine until a variety of different components is assembled in the correct way, each part being in its right place, and performing its function correctly in relation to the others. Similarly, there is the unity of an organism, which is constituted by organs and members, each only significant as parts of a whole. The machine or the organism are only deserving of those names in so far as they function, otherwise they are simply aggregates. Their unity is realised dynamically.

Unities of three members are also a fact of experience. St Patrick's use of shamrock, with its three lobes united in one leaf, is a traditional story. Or, consider a room lighted by three light bulbs. Each of the sources of light is distinct, but we do not say that the room is light with three 'lightnesses'. It is simply light; and that by reason of three sources of light. All

three of these are identical in operation, and operate together, being controlled by a single switch. They differ in their special relationship to one another, being spaced in such a way that their combined light will give full illumination to the room.

We may speak of a wicket as a trinity. Here we have three stumps in one wicket. But there are not three wickets, but one wicket. If the bowler puts back the off stump, then the batsman has lost his wicket; and so with the middle stump and the leg stump. No one who plays the game would ever think of saying, 'I haven't lost my wicket, I've only lost one stump.' So each stump is the wicket. And yet there is no wicket until all three stumps are set up, and joined by the bails. The three stumps are of the same substance, being identical sticks of ash. Each is distinct by its position in relation to the other two. To be the leg stump means to have two other stumps on the off side of it; to be the middle, to have one on either side, and so on. But this model is limited by the fact that the stumps are identical, interchangeable, and of course they are passive and not active; they are things and not persons.

For a personal model we may seek elsewhere. The cricket secretary sends me a card inviting me to play on Wednesday evening. This happens to be the evening on which I had arranged to discuss with my cousin the plans for a family holiday together. Moreover, this is the only occasion on which Councillor Smith can find time to talk about an urgent matter of public policy which I have raised with him. You may think, therefore, that I have a problem of deciding a question of priority. But there is no problem. There is one relevant fact which I forgot to tell you. My cousin Bob is Bob Smith, the cricket club secretary, and he is also Councillor Smith who represents my ward. Here are three areas of singularity. There is Cousin Bob, committed to the complex of family relationships. There is Bob the Secretary, involved in the relationships of the team and the club house. And there is Councillor Bob, participating in the life of the council chamber and the ward. Three complexes of relationships are united in one singular. We may even say that the affable, generously sporting Bob of the cricket field is 'quite another person' from the

vehement and uncompromising orator of the council chamber. But this is itself a paradox, and it points to the limitation of this particular model. For by using such a figure of speech we indicate that we *are* talking about the same person, but expressing our surprise at the striking contrast in the different modes of his behaviour.

St Augustine's models

'Vestiges' is the name given by St Augustine of Hippo to the models of the Trinity which he suggests. Such vestiges, he says, can in fact be seen everywhere. The act of seeing something is a case in point. Here we have a trinity of the person seeing, the act of seeing, and the object seen. 'I see a tree' records one event in which I am involved, a single experience which is a simple unity. But it is also a trinity of 'I', 'seeing', and 'tree'. The three are distinguishable in abstraction, but in the event are inextricably united. You cannot have an 'I', or subject, without it manifesting itself in some sort of experience. You cannot conceive of an object except as the percept of an experiencing subject. You cannot have a perceiving without a perceiver and a perceived. The three only 'come to life' in the unitary event covered by 'I see a tree'. But we would claim some sort of independent status for 'I' and 'seeing' and 'tree'. I am not an aspect of a tree, nor a tree of me.

When the object of perception is no longer there, but has become a memory, we have a trinity which is wholly within the mind, and models of this sort St Augustine prefers. Now there is the trinity of intention, or will, directed to recalling the image; the recollected image, somehow latent in the mind; and the actual presentation of it to consciousness in the act of recollecting. In this case, he can say that, whilst three distinguishable factors are involved, they are 'of one and the same substance'. Certainly, that other model from human love fascinates St Augustine, with its trinity of lover, beloved, and uniting love. But it is the 'trinitarian situations' within a single mind, and which permit of being understood as in the

'one substance', that he develops. Every individual is a trinity of being, knowing, and willing. Memory holds the potentiality of self-knowledge; understanding operates on this material; and love, or will, sets the operation in motion. This model throws light on the relations of the divine persons – the three, he points out, 'are not three lives, but one life, not three minds but one mind, and consequently are not three substances, but one substance' (*De Trinitate* 10: 18). But the model is most revealing when the three-fold operation of the human mind is directed towards God himself – when it is engaged in recollecting, knowing, and loving God. This situation is moreover especially appropriate as a model, for 'it is only when the mind has focused itself with all its powers of remembrance, understanding and loving on its Creator, that the image it bears of Him, corrupted as it is by sin, can be fully restored' (J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, p. 278).

In other words, it is not by chance that the internal life of a man affords models which point to the internal 'economy' of the Godhead. It is of God's ordaining. It is what is meant by man being made in the image of God. We can see here the relevance of the three characteristics of man as soul which we examined in Chapter 3. They were singularity, freedom, and love. Singularity in man points to the divine singularity, to the Personal absolute which we call God the Father; freedom in man points to the freely willing, to the creative and redemptive will which we call the Son; and love in man points to the Love between Father and Son, 'proceeding' from both, and illuminating and inspiring mankind, which we call the Holy Spirit.

'And we have in ourselves', says St Augustine, 'an image of that Holy Trinity, which shall be perfected by reformation, and made very like it; though it be far unequal, and far distant from it, being briefly neither co-eternal with God, nor of his substance, yet it is the nearest to it of any creature; for we have both a being, know it, and love both our being and knowledge.' (*De civitate dei*, 11, 26.) Being, willing, and knowing are not in us 'personal', and in speaking of the Persons,

St Augustine returns to the model of love between human persons. 'And herein may be seen how the persons in the deity are three and not more than three: One who loves Him who is from Himself; and One who loves Him from whom He is; and Love itself. And in this Trinity is the supreme source of all things, and the most perfect beauty and the most blessed delight.' (*De Trin.* 12.)

The Holy Spirit is neither of the Father alone, he says, nor of the Son alone, but of both. We speak of a Son because the Father is eternally self-communicating, but Father and Son so intimately interpenetrate one another that we cannot speak of the Spirit 'proceeding' from one and not from the other. 'Producing' the Spirit is their common action, as the creation is the common action of all three. The self-communication from eternity ('begetting') involved the production of the Spirit – the mutual love wherewith Father and Son reciprocally love one another. 'Though the Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son, he is in no way subordinate, but eternal and co-equal. When he comes as a gift from God, as God He Himself gives himself.' (*De Trin.* 15.)

St Augustine's life and thought centred on his absorbing sense of God's presence, his power, and his majesty. He sees that he can be approached in love: reason alone cannot approach him; though He may condescend to show something of himself by illuminating the mind of the earnest seeker. In his own contemplative experience, St Augustine enjoyed rare moments of insight – '*mens mea attigit ad ID QUOD EST in ictu trepidantis aspectus*' – 'my mind reached to THAT WHICH IS in the flash of a trembling glance'. Such moments brought home to him that the divine nature is humanly ineffable – that all language about it is analogical and paradoxical. 'Yet when it is asked what the Three are, human utterance is weighed down by deep poverty of speech. All the same, we say three "persons", not that we wish to say it, but that we may not be reduced to silence.' It is 'for the sake of speaking of things which are ineffable, that we may be able in some way to say what we can in no way say fully'. (*De Trin.* 5: 10.)

7
Miracle – 1

'Are the miracle stories true?' 'Can't you be a Christian without believing in miracles?' Questions of this sort indicate that people today find in miracle stories an almost insurmountable obstacle to the acceptance of the Christian gospel. Sceptics see in them one of the vulnerable points of the Christian position. Many believers, too, feel that they are an embarrassment. Some would claim that the real essence of the gospel is to be found elsewhere, say in the teaching and example of Christ, and suggest that miracles are a sort of optional extra for the credulous. Some teachers of religion try to reassure the dubious, with almost unseemly haste, that the miracle stories of the gospels have some quite 'natural' explanation. The feeding of the five thousand, for example, is commonly presented as an occasion when Jesus set an example of generous fellowship, and induced a large gathering of people to produce and share the packets of sandwiches which they had been keeping for themselves.

'*Miracle*' *speaks of more than just a kind of event*

The difficulty with miracles is that, whereas religious language and belief is popularly thought to be concerned with the realms of the 'supernatural' and 'spiritual', where they are safely out of reach of physical science, it is precisely in the realm of the physical, where science can show its most notable successes, that miracle makes its bold claims. In the realm where the scientist has been so successful in exploring, mapping, and predicting, certain events are claimed to be the direct action of God, and as such, quite outside of the scope of scientific investigation. Thus, the believer feels inclined to

say that the natural world works according to 'natural laws', which can be discovered. But at various points, God has cut across these natural laws, and has made things happen by his own direct operation on things. So when asked what a miracle is, believers have tended, often, to define it as a particular kind of event – the fact that it happened, is, they say, attested by history, and its nature is to be inexplicable. So there is talk of 'suspension of natural law', of 'things science cannot explain', or 'things only God can do'.

Now this sort of definition of miracle is, to say the least, very precarious. It is saying to the scientist that things happen in the physical world which he cannot explain; and that this is one of the evidences for religious belief.

But scientific knowledge is continually expanding. What is today unexplained, may, with the advance of knowledge of this type, be explained sometime in the future. What is not explained is not, in fact, inexplicable. What is now regarded as a miracle will then no longer be a miracle. So the events which may appropriately be described as miracles will decrease in number as knowledge increases in scope. Similarly, as knowledge increases, embracing more and more events once thought inexplicable, the area of 'things which only God can do' will contract. Since we can never say what will or will not turn out to be inexplicable, we cannot be sure what sort of things can only be done by God. In fact, only God can know what only God can do. So we cannot use this as a definition of miracle.

Similar difficulty arises in connection with the notion of the 'suspension of natural law'. The crossing of the Red Sea was widely considered to be a miracle. Dry land appeared where normally there was water, by the direct action of God suspending the natural law about the flow of water. The incident has been pictured by countless people somewhat in the way it was portrayed in the film *The Ten Commandments*. But now, the location has been identified with Lake Timseh. Here, comparatively rare meteorological conditions can combine with certain conditions of the lake, to sweep its shallow water back to make temporarily a dry crossing, or at least a

shallow ford. The remarkable event has after all been fitted in to 'natural law'. And so, according to our definition, it is now no longer a miracle.

To a disinterested nomad, who happened to be a witness of the crossing of the Red Sea, the affair was simply a curiosity: 'How lucky for those Hebrews to be crossing just when there were these freak conditions.' To the Hebrew, however, who was personally involved, the events came as a disclosure: 'I must confess that I was a bit dubious about our leader and his promises about what this god Yahweh could do. But after this . . . well, who could doubt that he was somehow behind it?' Both are referring to the same event. But each sees it in a different light. 'Yahweh being behind it' was obviously not involved in it for everyone. And 'God being behind it' is certainly part of what we would want to claim for 'miracle'.

We conclude that any attempt to define 'miracle' *solely* as a certain kind of event must inevitably fail. This is not to say that remarkable, even unique events, must have their part in the miracle situation. But when we use the word miracle we are saying more about an event than that it is remarkable, and apparently not conforming to the rules. We are adopting a particular attitude to it.

In other words, the proper sphere of the word 'miracle' is not a context of the purely physical. It is not simply the equivalent of 'something which has only happened once', or 'something which happened without the normal sort of causes and effects leading up to it'. The proper sphere of miracle is a religious one. It is a remarkable event understood in a religious way. It is an event which may or may not be understood *in one way* as the result of the operation of normal causes and effects; but also, and at the same time, be understood to have a special significance religiously, as being, *in a different way*, somehow 'caused' by God. Our task, then, is to examine how events have been understood religiously to have been 'caused' by God: and then to consider in what way God's special action, and ordinary causal action, can be thought of as operating at the same point, to produce the same effect.

Miracle in the New Testament – 'Signs and wonders'

First, it is to be noticed that the word miracle is derived from the Latin *miraculum*, meaning a 'wonder'. The word is significantly ambiguous – it refers both to the remarkable event, and to the feeling that it excites in us. A wonder is something extraordinary. And our response to something extraordinary is to wonder at it. The New Testament miracles are described as 'signs and wonders'. 'Wonder' indicates that something abnormal, startling, or disquieting has occurred. There is a spontaneous reaction of awe – 'and they were beyond measure astonished'. But to those who are personally involved in the event, it appears as a 'sign' – they understand that in this particular event God is acting, and through it, he is somehow disclosing himself, in the act, perhaps, of helping man in distress.

The narratives of the miracles of Jesus in the gospels show clearly that they are to be understood as much more than merely prodigious events. Of course, they *were* prodigious events; sufficiently remarkable that they inspired awe in uncommitted bystanders – 'Fear took hold on all'. But it is clear that they were not understood by the disciples simply as demonstrations of supernatural power. There is little to suggest that they fell into the error which has misled some Christians since. This is to answer the question, 'How do we know that Jesus was the Son of God?' by the reply, 'Because he performed miracles. Only divine power could have done these things. Therefore Jesus was divine.' This is quite a mistaken way of looking at Jesus' miracles. Three considerations help to make this clear.

1. There were many popular beliefs among the Jews concerning the expected Messiah, and one of these was that when he came, he would be recognisable by a Messianic sign. That is, he would perform some astonishing act which would compel the admiration and allegiance of all. ('What then doest thou for a sign? that we may see and believe thee?' John 6: 30) Jesus consistently refused to give such a sign. ('Verily I say unto you, there shall no sign be given unto this generation',

Mark 8: 12.) Of course, some of his deeds were interpreted in this way. For instance, some who were present at the feeding of the five thousand must have understood the incident, which was so public, and on such a large scale, to be the sign they awaited. St John tells us that immediately after, they were ready 'to take him by force to make him King' (John 6: 15). On the other hand, it is important to notice that to those who were unsympathetic, the miracle had not such meaning. The hostile Jews are prompted only to judicious appraisal, and comparison. 'Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness,' they say, meaning 'This really isn't good enough for Messias. Moses did just as well as that'.

2. Compared with other wonder stories of the same age, the stories of Jesus' miracles are told with remarkable restraint. In the story of the epileptic boy, for instance, the lad falls to the ground unconscious, so that 'the more part said, He is dead' (Mark 9: 26). It would have been simple (and tempting) for the writer to say that the boy was indeed dead, if the point of the story was the wonder of his restoration to health. But it is not the point. The central figure of the story is the father, and his faith; at his wits' end, he throws himself on the compassion of Jesus. Jesus demands his unreserved commitment; the father responds – 'I believe, help thou mine unbelief' – and through this response comes the disclosure of the power of compassionate love.

3. I have shown how Jesus' career is interpreted to us as that of the Messiah who was the Son of God, and claimed that this understanding of him can only be the result of the total impact of Jesus on those who knew him. So all his deeds are portrayed as acts of the Messiah. For instance, read the story of the healing of the deaf mute in Mark 7: 32 and following verses. The clue to the way the story is told can be found in the Messianic prophecy of Isaiah 35: 5f. The word used for 'having an impediment in his speech' is *mogilalos*; and the only other place that this rather uncommon word is used, in either Old or New Testament, is in the Greek version of Isaiah 35: 6. The exclamation of the bystanders was, 'He hath done all things well'. This is, in the Greek, strongly reminis-

cent of Genesis 1:31 – 'God saw everything that he made, and behold it was very good'. In other words, this is the Messiah's act: and the Messiah's acts are the new creation. The miracles are true 'acts of the Messiah', and the 'works none other did' (John 15:24). As fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy they are presented to us: 'the very works that I do', Jesus is represented as saying, 'bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me' (John 5:36).

Sometimes, indeed, this manner of interpretation fairly obscures the nature of the incident. Jesus was often on the sea of Galilee with his friends, and this is the scene of two miracles generally regarded as most difficult: stilling the storm, and walking on the sea. Whatever the actual happenings were, they are recorded in ways which suggest the unity of Christ with God, who showed his power by 'moving on the face of the deep' (Genesis 1:2). God's control of sea and storm is a recurrent theme in the psalms (cf. Psalms 107:28, 29, 65:7, 89:9). When sailors 'cry unto the Lord in their trouble . . . he bringeth them out of their distresses. He maketh the storm calm, so that the waves thereof are still.' It is also worth noticing that the terms used in stilling the storm are precisely the same as those used when Jesus drives an 'evil spirit' out of a man. In other words, the writer considers this as another act of exorcism, in this case driving the evil spirit out of the storm.

Four elements in the miracle situation

A prodigious event is described religiously as a miracle when it 'comes alive' in a personal way. The miracle is no impersonal operation of divine benevolence. The emphasis is always on the personal aspect of the situation. In a crisis of suffering or danger, men receive help, and in receiving it, are aware that it is God himself who is giving the help. He has disclosed his personal concern in what is felt to be an individual act of will. He has responded to a personal need, or appeal, in a personal way. Thus, when the leper threw himself at Jesus' feet, saying, 'If thou wilt, thou canst make me whole', there was a spon-

taneous response of compassion – 'I will, be thou made clean' (Mark 1:40f). To believe in miracles is to believe that God can, and does, by unique volitions, cause unique events to happen, and through them he is in contact with man, revealing himself in the act of succouring him. It is therefore to claim that fundamentally the universe is not an impersonal machine working according to ascertainable rules which are fixed; but that the personal will of the Singular is at the bottom of it. The Singular can be said to intervene in the world of nature, it is claimed, to bring about purposes by causing changes in things animate and inanimate. The word 'miracle' makes a 'free-will' claim about the whole universe.

Now, the claim that God is in touch with his world, and with men at particular points, is not peculiar to miracle. Revelation, providence, worship and prayer, are terms which all make the same claim, and pose the same problem. We may therefore consider them together. Each involves a personal situation. This situation is one in which four elements may be discerned. These will become apparent if we take as a model a human personal situation of a common and prosaic kind.

Imagine a schoolboy who is having difficulty with his mathematics. He has failed to understand in class, and he has not been able to do his homework. The next maths period draws near; his alarm increases. As he broods in his misery, the headmaster sweeps into view down the corridor. He is an austere figure, remote, and seemingly unapproachable. But despair prompts a course of desperate courage. 'Please, Sir . . .', 'Well, what is it, Jones?' There is an initial shock of surprise – 'Fancy him knowing my name!' – and then Jones stammers out his troubles. He is drawn into a nearby form room. He finds himself sitting beside his headmaster, listening, as he explains. Light begins to dawn, and difficulty dissolves. But maths is not all that he learns. Not only can the headmaster 'do them' – that is only to be expected – but he is actually keen on maths, seems positively to enjoy it. There is a disclosure of the headmaster as a man, a helpful man, a man who knows boys' names, a man good at problems. 'All right,

Jones. Go off now and do the next six.' Off goes Jones. Of course he will do the next six.

There has been a disclosure, through the medium of the apparently intractable problem, of the headmaster as a person. He is ready to become personally involved in the same situation as that in which Jones finds himself. The disclosure is effected in the act of succouring Jones's distress. Jones's original appeal involved an initial commitment. The headmaster's response involved a demand, and Jones's commitment became specific. Here we have the four elements of the corresponding religious situations, of which miracle is a special case – disclosure, succour, demand, commitment. The religious situations are distinguishable according to the elements which are emphasised.

Kinship with Revelation, Providence, Prayer

The sort of outlook mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, which wishes to avoid scandal by relegating religious experience to the safe realm of the 'spiritual', is reluctant to allow the kinship of revelation and miracle. Hence the preference in some quarters for the term 'insight', in place of 'revelation', emphasising the human achievement rather than the divine disclosure. But 'revelation' points to an awareness of God distinct in kind from that which comes to unaided reflection, however profound that may be. To the religious man, revelation does not mean that in a moment of special awareness he has come upon God; it means that in a moment of special receptiveness God has come upon him. The criterion of revelation, like that of miracle, is in an awareness of unique transaction with God. Both may be said to come at a personal crisis. But miracle's crisis is one of conflict and suffering; revelation's crisis is more usually a crisis of spiritual development. Isaiah was at a turning point of his life when he had his famous vision in the temple (Isaiah 6). His spiritual development had reached a climax at which he was aware of his vocation – quite literally, his 'calling'. God approached him with an overwhelming disclosure of his majesty and

power. At the same time his succour meets Isaiah's sense of sinful inadequacy. In this situation God makes his demand of his service, and Isaiah responds with total commitment: 'Here am I, send me.'

Miracle situations and revelation situations are both intensely personal experiences. But miracle emphasises the succour, whereas revelation emphasises disclosure.

'Providence' is another religious word used to express God's traffic with the world. Providence is used sometimes to indicate that the Power ordering the natural world is purposeful and benevolent. God's controlling power is made so comprehensive, and spread so thin, that Providence becomes a platitude, without the vitality to pose any embarrassing philosophical problem. But an equally characteristic use is in connection with particular events. Like miracle, it claims that God as personal will can be apprehended through physical events, because he is in fact operative upon them. For instance, during the evacuation from the beaches of Dunkirk in 1940, the sea was calm for days together. This, some would say, was providential: it was a particular act of God to save the B.E.F. from suffering and death. There is not the same striking nature of the event as in miracle: calm seas in the channel are not unlikely in high summer.

Succour is indeed the chief feature of what we feel disposed to designate as 'acts of providence'. But they are distinctive in this, that they lack the intensity of personal experience of contact with God at the time. God's personal concern is in these cases more usually discerned in reflection. God is seen to be involved, not because of disclosure at a particular time, but because a particular saving event can be seen to fit in to a pattern in retrospect. Garibaldi's retreat from Rome in 1848 might have seemed like a defeat at the time, but would be seen after all as providential in the general pattern of events leading up to his liberation of Italy in 1859. Once a man comes to a knowledge of God, he may look back over his life, and see, as part of a pattern of God's ordering, what at the time seemed to be chance encounters. Like miracle, providential events cannot be defined simply as events.

The point here being made is that the word 'providence' simply makes the claim that there *are* acts of succouring intervention. But how do we know which they are? Notoriously, some will describe as providential events which others are far from regarding as such. The defeat of the Armada was discerned as providential by the Protestant English. For the Spaniards, it must have appeared as a special case of the problem of evil. What is the criterion? Obviously it cannot be the purely subjective one – that it is an event which affords a disclosure to a particular person or group of persons. For any event might then qualify. 'Providential' would not then describe an event; it would really refer *solely* to people's attitudes. If it be conceded that 'God encountering' experience and language are valid in the way religious people claim them to be, the problem of discriminating between genuine encounter and hallucination, between Jeremiah and Judge Rutherford, becomes an important one.

'Prayer is the term for a religious situation which also claims that God intervenes in his world – in this case, directly with his creatures. The Christian claims that when by his own volition he directs himself to God, a real relationship is established. In other words, God personally responds to our personal approach. I am not speaking now of prayer being 'answered', but of the basic assumption that when we pray, God is 'there', at the other end, so to speak, in a personal way. Impersonal models will not do for this situation. We cannot, for instance, think in terms of plugging in to a source of spiritual supply. In the early days of steam radio, a favourite analogy of preachers for the life of prayer was 'tuning in': the Christian at prayer was 'in tune with the infinite'. Though perhaps in some small degree illuminating, this model fails, because prayer is not a matter of picking up a transmission put out by God, which is the same for all.

Apparently such a model is still felt by some to avoid the scandal of suggesting that God responds individually and personally to the approach of man at prayer. In the same way as 'insight' seems preferable to revelation, it seems less objectionable to think of prayer simply in its aspect of human

aspiration – 'myself at my best', as it has recently been described.

Some people, although admitting that God is somehow active in the revelation and prayer situations, feel that they do not present the same problem as miracle, because it is not physical intervention, but 'purely mental and spiritual'. A moment's thought will, however, show the inappropriateness of this distinction. Our minds are just as much a part of the creation as wine or bread or storms on the lake. Moreover, the notion that there is some aspect of the human self which may be described as spiritual, and which is somehow distinct and separate, is open to all the objections which we found to the notion of the soul as a separable part of man.

Further consideration of prayer

The appropriate model for prayer is obviously that of an intimate personal relationship. Consider a close group of friends.

1. To a member of the group we may say, 'Do my duty for me. I'm going for a swim.' We ask with confidence, without qualification or diffidence which we might show to someone not a member of the group. This is because we are committed to one another in a special way which gives us the 'right' to ask.

2. The same rights which we mutually enjoy, we extend on occasion to others outside of this particular relationship. When you say, 'Come and give a hand with changing this chap's wheel', you have the same confidence in invoking, though not perhaps explicitly, the rights of friendship.

3. Sometimes, you may, through inconsiderateness or selfishness, act disloyally to a friend. You accept the only ticket left for the concert, when you were vaguely committed to an evening together; he finds himself excluded, and at a loose end. When you later realise the situation fully, you feel disquiet and grief at your disloyalty. This can only be set right by frank avowal: and you know that the restoration of the relationship demands more than a mere apology; it

demands implementation of your resolve not to do such a thing again.

4. Your friendship is founded on an admiration of your friends' qualities. They are dependable, entertaining, loyal, sharing a variety of interests.

5. You enjoy association with them, and are in fact proud that you belong to the group. We do not commonly express this sense of admiration for and pleasure in the company of our friends, and it would cause us some embarrassment to do so. But we are all aware of it.

These five aspects of friendship afford models for each aspect of prayer.

1. Petition. Our commitment to God, our belief that he is personally involved with us gives us the right to ask.

2. Intercession. The same right extends to our asking for others.

3. Penitence, confession. We are grieved by our failure to live up to what is demanded of us. We confess our fault, and resolve on amendment of life.

4. We are aware of God's infinite worth, and so express our devotion in adoration and worship.

5. We are grateful for being accepted into his love and friendship. We express this in prayers of thanksgiving.

The last two modes express themselves naturally in public worship, as well as in private devotion. Those who pray regularly find its deepest expression in 'affective prayer', that is, prayer without words, in which they feel themselves, albeit in humility and gratitude, in deep personal rapport with God.

The true 'prayer situation' is like friendship and love, difficult to communicate to those who have not experienced it. It can only be commended to them. The only sensible answer to the fellow who asks, 'Why do you always go around with X and Y?' is, at an appropriate time, to say, 'Care to come along?' As I suggested earlier, love and friendship usually precede any objective evaluation of the beloved or the friend. When we enter upon personal relationships, it is not as a result of the careful weighing of relative merit in the way that we might consult *Which?* before we buy a refrigerator. It is

not generally thought imprudent to commit ourselves to relationships without very much idea of the sort of situation in which we may be involved. In the same way, men commit themselves to God in prayer, and in the practice of the Christian life, on grounds other than a thoughtful estimate of the relative claims of different religions. In fact the choice of a religion on intellectual grounds is extremely rare.

Prayer, then, is a personal situation of encounter with God, with the emphasis on the demand-commitment aspect of the encounter, although of course revelation and succour will not infrequently be elements in it. The terms revelation, providence, prayer and miracle, all make the same sort of claim, namely that a personal God is operative in and through physical events; that, in sum, the Freely-willing Personal is ultimate in the universe. Religious discourse is making its distinctive claims. 'God caused the storm', and 'A deep depression caused the storm', are grammatically similar, but logically distinct – that is to say, speaking about the same event in different spheres of discourse. But simply to say that they are distinct spheres of discourse cannot satisfy us. 'When all is said, the idea of events being initiated *ad hoc* by the divine will, and the idea of them being causally determined by what has gone before in the intramundane situation appear *prima facie* to be contradicaory to one another, and the uneasy feeling of contradiction is not assuaged by saying blandly that we are looking at the same thing from different angles.' (H. H. Farmer, *The World and God*, p. 157.) The second part of our task is to try to find the sorts of model which may enable us to integrate the two, helping us so to think of the universe that the contradiction is only apparent.

8

Miracle – 2

Our difficulty: (a) logical (b) fortuitous

We have seen that the idea of miracle is not extra to the Christian gospel, but essential to it. The claim of miracle has led us to the quest for an understanding of the way in which God as cause can be said to operate on events which are at the same time members of natural series of cause and effect. We live in a universe of space and time, and all our ordinary thought and language is appropriate to the space-time situation. There is nothing absurd or contradictory, however, in supposing that space-time is contained in a larger reality. Some people deny this, but what they really deny is the possibility of getting evidence of such a reality. The bare possibility of there being such a larger context in which our space-time universe exists cannot logically be denied. Much traditional philosophy, and of course Christian thinking, supposes that the real does in fact extend beyond what is knowable in terms of space and time. This greater reality can only be spoken of analogically. It can never be exhaustively described. In this sense it remains mysterious.

If we could look at things without the space-time limitation, apparent contradictions might disappear. A parable will show how this could be. Our world is three-dimensional; it is an affair of solid geometry. We might imagine, however, a two-dimensional world, an affair of plane geometry. It would be inhabited by a race of Plane Men, living on the one surface – a superficial life indeed. Now, in plane geometry it is a maxim that at any point on a straight line, a straight line may be drawn through it at right angles; and only one line may be so drawn. But say a visitor from our three-dimensional world managed to adapt himself to these conditions. He would cer-

tainly have news for his hosts. He could point out that more than one line can be drawn at right angles to a point. There is the vertical one for a start. In fact, there are an infinite number, as there are an infinite number of angles to the plane in which the line lies. What would be the reaction of his new friends? It is fairly obvious that they would say that this was a logical impossibility. They would laugh him to scorn. How *could* things have a third dimension?[1]

May we not be in the same position in respect of causes? Accepting one sort of causation appropriate to our finite world, and rejecting, because quite unable to conceive, a causation from 'outside', operating on the same events? In considering such a possibility, we have the same logical limitation as the Plane Men have. But we have a further limitation which is not logical, but fortuitous. It is the limitation imposed upon us by a world-view which we build up by imperceptible stages from our earliest days, and in which mechanical models have priority over all others. This world-view is the product of scientific ways of thought, and of the language adapted to it—of the 'mathematical plainness' which concerns itself primarily with objects and their measurement. Science has been so very successful in theory, and so rewarding in practice, that, unknowingly, we have grown up as materialists at heart. Not that all, or even many scientists are materialists in the strict meaning of the word – that is, believing that matter is all that there is. But matter is the subject of science; it is matter which is measurable and predictable; by measuring it and predicting, we can control the natural world in a way of which Descartes dreamed. Inevitably, we come to think of a material world, and the sorts of causes which operate among material things, as somehow the most important. By the methods of science, and expressed in its language, we expect to gain knowledge of the most real sort. It is objective knowledge, that is, knowledge built up with the least interference of the observing subject. Its great strength is that it is public, and open to the inspec-

[1] This illustration is developed from a suggestion of Heim, mentioned by Farmer, *op. cit.*, p. 102. Since writing the above, my attention has been drawn to a book called *Flatland* by A. Square, containing an authoritative account of the world of the Plane Men.

tion, understanding, and verification of all. We use the word 'knowing' in other ways, for instance of knowing how to use skills, or knowing people. We admit a kind of knowledge appropriate for instance to the arts – aesthetic knowledge. But we tend to accord a secondary status to all other sorts of knowledge other than that which can be summed in formulae, and written down in books of scientific theory.

Such a view of knowledge goes towards building the world-view of normal modern men and women. It is unconsciously absorbed. Notice, for instance, how readily a sense of uncertainty or puzzlement is allayed by the offering of a scientific approach to a problem; how relieved we are when some belief we cherish finds a 'scientific' backing; and how pleased when some curiosity like snake-charming, which we like to think of, but have not seen, is made secure to our imaginations by a scientific explanation. Notice, too, how frequently people use the word 'logical' to mean 'clearly true', and how, if pressed, they regard it as synonymous with 'scientific'. All this may itself seem so 'logical' and 'clearly true', that to describe it as imposing a limitation upon us may seem odd. I shall want to examine the nature of scientific knowledge later. But in the mean time, to make clear what I mean by limitation here, consider the bridge of San Luis Rey.

The bridge of San Luis Rey[1] was an ancient Inca bridge which crossed a deep chasm on the road between Cuzco and Lima. On Friday, 20 July 1714, a party of five travellers was making its way along the road in the blaze of noon. Some little way behind the party came one Brother Juniper, a Franciscan friar. He was travelling light, and overtaking them, as he saw them set out along the bridge. Suddenly, and without warning, it collapsed. The five were thrown to immediate death on the rocks far below. 'Why did this happen to those five?' This was the question which Brother Juniper asked himself. He spent the rest of his life trying to answer it. In exploring the stories of the lives of these travellers, he came to believe that this violent death had come appropriately to each. To the wicked it came as a judgment, which also spared others from

[1] See *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, Thornton Wilder, 1927.

suffering. To the good, it came as a release from intolerable situations, affecting other lives in various ways.

Here, then, two quite different stories lead to the collapse of the bridge. One is of God's purposes for human lives, not for the five travellers only, but for others besides – purposes all converging on this single moment of time. But also converging on it is the other story, the story of sun, wind and frost, of crumbling rock, the fraying of osier ropes, the rotting of timber, all leading to the moment of disintegration. Which of these stories appears to us to give the most reasonable explanation of the happening? I think we should feel inclined to say that it is the second story which affords the 'real' explanation. A majority would perhaps say that this is the sole explanation, allowing to the first story no value as explanation at all, whatever other function it might have.

Objective knowledge

Our difficulty, then, in conceiving miracle, lies first in the fact that it claims that a larger context contains our space-time universe, and that from this larger context, Personal Will breaks in, to influence events directly in a way that may be spoken of analogically as causal. Second, the climate of opinion in our age is one which gives priority in explanation to the language of the spatio-temporal, and which considers that valid knowledge is expressed in the language of science, of which the characteristics are to be objective and impersonal.

Scientific language accepts a voluntary limitation in order to achieve its objects. It limits itself to the impersonal and objective. Its ideal of knowledge is that in which personal and subjective elements are minimal. Even when turning its attention to human beings and their experience, individually or in groups, its method remains the same, considering them as objects for analysis. Inevitably the picture of the world which this method sponsors is an odd one, and even caricatures our everyday experience. Eddington's table is a well known example. We feel that there is no incongruity in saying that our brown, smooth table, which smells of polish and adorns

our dining room, is really simply an aggregate of odourless, colourless atoms, which consist for the most part of empty space. The usefulness of such a view of matter it would of course be foolish to deny. But its whole point *is* to be useful. It is a means of controlling matter, and using it for our purposes. It is these purposes that justify such a picture: and these are the purposes of men and women actively pursuing ends. Atomic theory, for instance, is the necessary antecedent to achieving the end of producing power: the production of power serves an end which is personal – men produce power for themselves and for others in society. So the meaning of this theory which so oddly distorts the world which our senses perceive is that it satisfies human need. Of course it satisfies the need of the enquiring human mind, with its passion for ordering experience. But it also satisfies the practical need of human persons in relation to one another. To see the meaning of human persons in relationship as a special case of the colourless, odourless world of the physicist – the world of 'the hurrying of material, endlessly, meaninglessly' – this is to stand the world on its head.

Our respect for the ideal of objective knowledge springs from the fact that it seems to be able to fit into a pattern experiences which otherwise seem incongruous. Snow, which is commonly white, is occasionally pink, for instance on distant mountains at sunset. Sticks, normally straight, are bent when seen in water. Crude explanations would be 'mountain snow turns pink at sunset', or 'liquids can bend sticks'. But these explanations do not fit in with people's experience who are actually standing on the snow at the time, or feeling the sticks. The physicist's story, on the other hand, of red light and of refraction, makes sense of the odd experiences and relates them to an ordered whole. We accept the fact that one or more senses can sometimes be deceived. We realise that the senses are in fact an uncertain guide, if it is comprehensiveness of explanation we are after. The physicist's story not only makes our fallibility intelligible, but even predicts situations in which appearances will be deceptive, for instance, the conditions of light in which snow will appear blue. The less,

apparently, we allow our individual perceptions, and individual likes and dislikes, to interfere in the construction of a pattern of the world, the more comprehensive the pattern can be, and the more easily it can be tested and communicated.

But what we are in the end directly concerned with is the immediacy of experience; with life as it comes to us, the life in which we are personally committed, the life which we live with other persons, the life in which we enjoy the beauty of nature as it comes to meet us in ordinary perception. We may indeed be passionately concerned with knowledge; but all knowledge is in the end *our* knowledge, and for our use. People sometimes speak of 'scientific knowledge' almost as though it had an independent existence, like an austere and inexorable despot, who in return for the benefits of his rule demands the banishment of all poetry and passion from man's life. But the Genie released from the scientist's bottle remains his slave, whatever exciting new power he brings. Nor does 'comprehensiveness of explanation' just hang in the air, like the smile of the Cheshire Cat. The wonders which science reveals to us, are wonders in the same ambiguous way that miracles are – the wonder that is wondered at, by men passionately committed to finding out. All knowledge is *someone's* knowledge.

'*Astronomic intimidation*'

A digression may perhaps be permitted here to deal with an argument which worries some, and which has been called 'astronomic intimidation'. Advances in astronomy have revealed to us the vastness of space, a vastness which can only be measured in light years. Once the earth was thought to be the centre of the universe. Then it was the sun. But now even the sun is spoken of slightingly – a comparatively small star near the edge of our galaxy. And our galaxy is only one among many. The astronomer presents us with an awe-inspiring picture of limitless space and time, a picture of tremendous power, of heat, of speed; he describes a life cycle of stars such that our sun will eventually expand to engulf the earth, but long after

all life has been scorched from the surface, and the seas have boiled dry. 'How can we presume', it is asked, 'to regard our life as important when we are such puny creatures, on a tiny planet, in a remote corner of one galaxy?'

Two obvious answers at once occur to us. First, 'puny', 'tiny', and 'remote' are begging the question that size and position are guides to significance. 'How big, then', we ask, 'would we have to be, and where would the earth have to be, to make us more important?' Second, even from within the scientific view of the universe, the picture presented is one-sided. We are being asked to consider ourselves in relation to the macroscopic. What of our relation to the microscopic? Each human brain contains more cells than there are stars in our galaxy. And of the infinitely small particles of which the physicist speaks, the simple objects around us contain quantities as mysteriously innumerable as all the stars. Far from being at the bottom of the scale of size, we might reasonably claim to be in the middle.

But there is a more important objection to this sort of argument. It has deliberately chosen an impersonal point of view: it has chosen to look at man as an object. It looks at him from a tremendous distance. And not unnaturally, he looks small. But what we are overlooking, if the argument impresses us, is the fact that the theory which sponsors this immense scale of distance and time is a construction of the human mind. It is the result of relating what is observed in the heavens to our terrestrial experience. The ultimate point of reference of light years and the ages of stars, is the fact that it is a mile to the station, and that breakfast was two hours ago. That we are in the middle of the scale of size is not an empirical fact, but a logical one. For in order to observe we look outward, and to make sense of our observations we reckon that the perspectives, both macroscopic and microscopic, are infinite. Thus the point of observation is by definition central, in the same sense that a terrestrial traveller is always at the mid point of the area enclosed by the horizon. It is no more appropriate, therefore, to feel intimidated because of the distance of Polaris, than it is to feel conceited because of the size of a microbe.

We are brought back to the fact that knowledge is personal, in the sense that it is something that we as individuals concern ourselves with, seek with zest, and use as persons. The notion of an objective, impersonal body of knowledge is a fiction. The whole rich variety of scientific discovery and hypothesis is dead until it becomes part of the active living of persons. We hold a textbook of physics in our hands. What is it? In a sense it is the sum of great human endeavour and enthusiasm and devoted purpose. In another, it is simply a collection of black marks on white paper. It has no meaning until you or I apply ourselves with the same purposive endeavour to its use. Then the black marks and symbols become knowledge – our knowledge, a feature of our singularity. It becomes part of us. We never become part of 'it'. 'The thinking subject is an existing individual. . . . The thinker who can forget in all his thinking also to think that he is an existing individual, will never explain life. He merely becomes an attempt to cease to be a human being, in order to become a book, or an objective something, which is possible only for a Munchausen. . . . If a man occupied himself all his life through with logic he would nevertheless not become logic; he must therefore himself exist in different categories.' (Kierkegaard, *Unscientific Postscript*, p. 85f.)

I am not underrating in the least all that can be summed under the rather general term 'science'. I am drawing attention to the fact that it is one way of knowing, not *the* way. The table which is mainly empty space is only a caricature if we insist that this is the fundamental truth about the table. As a factor in personal knowing, it becomes a useful model. It may enrich our experience of tables, but it must not dominate it. We may enjoy the beauty of a starry night: our sense of awe and beauty will be increased by some knowledge of astronomy. But if we allow this way of knowing to obsess us to the extent of rejecting our personal experience altogether, of regarding our enjoyment of beauty as an irrelevant by-product of the cosmic helium-gas plant, we are ceasing to be human beings. From my window I see an Atlantic Cedar, a Sequoia, and a Copper Beech. Some knowledge of their growth

and nature contributes to my pleasure in looking at them. In a sense they are of course different species of giant inverted lungs. But to say that trees are really just huge lungs does not go far towards explaining what those trees mean to me. In fact a man who had been nurtured to *see* all vegetation simply as mechanisms for transpiration and respiration would himself be a stunted human growth.

Changes in the scientist's view of the world

We may notice at this point that the scientist's view of the nature of his work and theories is, in our own time, somewhat different from the popular notion of it with which we have so far been dealing. The popular view is that the scientist goes to nature, and discovers its working – gradually he pieces together the working principles of the great machine, which functions according to rules – the rules of physics and chemistry and biology and astronomy. These rules, or laws, are thought of as actually *in* the natural world, waiting to be discovered. Once discovered, they help to explain the whole of nature in mechanical and material terms, that is, in terms of matter and its motion. (It follows, in this popular view, that science is gradually narrowing the areas in which other rules, such as spiritual ones, can operate. In fact, sooner or later, it is thought, the whole boiling will be scientifically explained, and there will be neither room nor need left for either metaphysics or religion.)

Now this may have been true of some naive and optimistic nineteenth-century men of science. But it is no longer the generally held view. The revolution in philosophy already described was in fact accompanied by a similar sort of revolution in science – at least, in the theory of what science was doing. Ernst Mach was a prime mover in this change, as a result of which scientists began to think less and less that they were discovering laws *in* nature. They ceased to think that the sum of things contained its own mathematical ordering—an ordering not only to be discovered, but also to be admired and wondered at. The ordering was simply in the theory. The

natural world presents us simply with a kaleidoscope of experiences – experiences of perception, of sight and sound and touch and smell. The scientist's job is to give order to this experiencing. His theory, or hypothesis is objective in the sense that anyone can understand and use it, to make experience intelligible. He is also under obligation of altering the hypothesis, should some new observation turn up which conflicts with it. There is no longer any need for Sir James Jeans's notion of God as 'the Great Mathematician', no wonders of nature to be discovered, whether we consider them from a religious point of view or not.

'Scientific theory, according to Mach, is merely a convenient summary of experience. Its purpose is to save time and trouble in recording observations. It is the most economical adaptation of thought to facts, and just as external to the facts as a map, a timetable, or a telephone directory; indeed, this conception of scientific theory would include a timetable or a telephone directory among scientific theories.' (Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge*, p. 9.)

In other words, experience has been separated from reason. There is no rationality in nature, according to this view. Rationality resides only in our attempts to make sense of it. This 'making sense' is of a mathematical nature. But mathematics used in forming scientific theory is separated from mathematics in itself – pure mathematics is distinct from applied mathematics. It is not perhaps difficult to see how this separation of mathematical theory from the things it explains can come about. Say we go out on a starry night, for instance at about 7 o'clock on a November evening, and I say, 'Look, there are Altair, Vega, and Deneb. You can always recognise them because they are in a big triangle.' You spot the stars, see them standing at the angles of a triangle, noting its apparent size in the sky, and thereafter are able to recognise the stars by this triangular arrangement. But there is of course no triangle 'out there' in space. But you and I and everyone knows what a triangle is. Draw one on a blackboard. This is of course an approximate triangle. You can see the irregular edges of the chalk lines if you look closely. Scribe one on a steel plate

with a fine implement – still, under magnification we see that the lines are ragged. Indeed, whatever lengths we go to, we shall never be able to draw a triangle which, under the microscope, does not reveal itself as merely approximate. In point of fact, there *are* no triangles, natural or contrived. Yet triangularity is essential to our understanding of experience. Nature only *suggests* triangularity to us; the whole rationality of the triangle, with all the geometric properties which we have ever learned about it, would seem to be a product of our minds. Thus, given the idea of triangularity, we are forced to agree, for instance, that the sum of its angles is 180°. So mathematics – pure mathematics – is concerned with all that is involved in concepts like triangle, cube and curve, worked out in our minds, and especially useful in coming to terms with the world around us. Mathematics is not *found* in the world, or read off from it. It is read into it.

The difference between pure and applied mathematics is thus the same as that between analytical and synthetic statements. In fact all mathematical statements are analytical, and must be true, whilst all scientific theories are synthetic and must be falsifiable. This at least is the position of much contemporary scientific and logical thought. But there are signs of a change towards a view which disposes of its anomalies – towards a theory of knowledge and of science which restores the subjective factor in knowledge, and claims that knowledge is indeed a direct apprehension of the natural world, which has an orderliness which is really inherent in it.

Problems of perception: a parable of possible solutions

The revolution in scientific thinking was no doubt due to impatience with traditional theories of knowledge. Philosophy was for a long time preoccupied with the theoretical difficulties which attend our perception of the world around us – how in fact we are in touch with things through our five senses. The problem was brought to the fore by Descartes's division of everything into Mind on the one hand, and Matter on the other. The difficulty is this: I see an apple, handle it, smell it,

taste it. All these sensations come to me by way of electrical impulses along the nerves to the brain. There, mysteriously, electrical signals become an awareness of redness, smoothness, a characteristic smell, and a sensation of sweetness. The whole of my experience of the apple is in fact in my mind. The redness is not experienced on the surface of the apple, nor is there a red patch on my eye, or even on my brain. The redness is a mental experience. So are touch, smell, taste. All that we are in fact aware of is a bundle of sensations, which we label 'sweet smooth red apple'. If all that we are acquainted with is our mental sensations, what can we say about the apple itself, 'out there' in the world? Common sense says that the apple itself is red. What we mean is that something or other has the power of making me experience redness. Anyway, if it means anything to say that the apple is red, what happens to the redness in the dark? I have, moreover, already drawn attention to the considerable mental contribution which we scarcely notice, in the most simple act of perception. 'What shape is that object lying on the table?' 'Round', we immediately reply, because we have recognised a penny. But what was actually presented to our vision was a brown ellipse.

My purpose is not to examine the problems of perception, but to indicate that there are problems[1] and also the alternative attitudes that may be taken to them. It is also to show why, wearied of centuries of seemingly profitless debate, the scientist tended to dismiss these questions as unanswerable, and accept the simple fact of sense perception. He contented himself with using as his material the bundles of data which appear in the mind, and endeavoured to set them in order, without committing himself as to their status in relation to 'objects'.

An illustration may help to clarify this problem of our knowledge of the world in so far as it bears upon our discussion. Imagine yourself in a large, dark room – perhaps a cinema as it might appear in a dream. You are looking through a small window from what is apparently the projection room. Spread across the opposite wall is a screen, filling all your

[1] The best elementary account of the various theories of perception is in C. E. M. Joad's *Philosophy*, pp. 82-119.

vision, like cinerama. The screen is covered by ever changing scenes, immense in size, elaborate in detail. You find that there are other spectators near you in the darkness, each looking through his or her window. You begin to discuss what you see. At first there is some confusion and talking at cross-purposes; until you discover that the whole scene is covered, faintly, by a grid, which is numbered horizontally, and lettered vertically. By means of this, you are able to indicate at once the parts of the scenes to which you want to draw anyone's attention. Nevertheless, rather puzzlingly, errors still occur. Some do not seem to be able to use the grid reference scheme quite accurately; others appear unable to identify the grid at all. The former may be owing to carelessness, and preoccupation with some special features of interest. The latter may be a defect of sight. But then another explanation occurs to you which might account for all errors. It could be that the grid is not marked on the wall, nor projected with the picture; perhaps it is really etched on the windows through which you are looking. Perhaps some windows are differently marked; perhaps some are not marked at all.

In other words perhaps the order in the world is really 'there' to be observed. Alternatively, the order is really in our apparatus of observation, and we project it on to the world outside in order to give some sort of coherence to the hotch-potch of sights and sounds which our senses bring us. I think the Christian philosopher requires a third alternative. This, in terms of the illustration, will be that the grid is both etched on the window *and* projected on the screen, in such a way that it only becomes apparent when the viewer so places himself that they coincide. In order to see things aright, he must look in the right way. The world presents itself to us as bundles of sensations. But we do not build up an orderly world in our minds, using these sensations as bricks. We do not even deduce from what we observe that there is an orderly world outside of us. Rather, if it is directed aright, the mind can use these sensations as a bridge, or rather a window, by which it passes out into a real world and actually grasps, or apprehends it. So that not only the mind is involved, but also

the will – the desire to know the truth. The Christian does not regard himself simply as a spectator of how the world appears on the outside, nor can he rest in an abstract and impersonal mathematical mapping of it. Knowledge for him is always a personal activity. He is prompted, not by idle curiosity, or desire for mere information, but by a sort of intellectual passion for truth, which he reckons God to have made accessible to him.

'*Monads*', *and a parable of* '*privileged position*'

Returning to our topic from the digressions of the last three sections, we must seek, for the view of miracle that I was putting forward, a model which will reconcile the apparently contradictory elements of predictable orderliness in nature, and the sporadic and unpredictable 'interventions' of God.

Such a model is suggested by H. H. Farmer,[1] and based on the metaphysic of Leibnitz. The latter put forward an ingenious picture of the world which had the merit of bridging the gap between mind and matter, between organic and inorganic. Everything, he said, consisted of 'monads', or independent units which make the world and everything in it appear as it is, but which are in themselves separate and intelligent 'souls'. They are not all equal – some are superior to others, and they are arranged in a hierarchy. But they all share in the ability to respond to God, and to carry out his will that things should appear and behave as they do. What if something like this were the case, asks Farmer? So he sketches a picture of a universe of 'created creators'. Lying behind phenomena, that is, behind all that appears to us of the universe, there could be such agents of God, inaccessible to our observation; below the level of human will and consciousness, yet having the power to respond to, and carry out God's will. Such a picture, I would emphasise, *is* only a picture – just one way of thinking through the puzzling contradiction which the scientific view of the

[1] H. H. Farmer, *The Word and God*, p. 171.

world presents to the man who is religiously aware of God's personal activity.

Recall our Plane Men. I have said that we may be in the same case as they are. We have the same inability to conceive an altogether different dimension of causal action on our world. Our visitor to the Plane World was able to reconcile what from within it were irreconcilables, because he observed from a privileged position. A privileged position in relation to our world might make the reconciliation which the miracle claim demands. It would not affect the picture of space-time which science affords, any more than the rules of plane geometry are affected by the claims of solid geometry. Both sets of causes can be operative, without our having to choose between them. A further illustration will make clear, perhaps, how an apparently secure and exclusive hypothesis may in fact represent a partial view.

Imagine visitors from another planet, without any previous knowledge of things on earth. Objects of size and power attract them, railway trains especially. They are impressed by the speed and power of the engines, particularly the largest, and note the precision and punctuality with which they run. With patient care they in fact build up a railway timetable, and constantly test its accuracy by successful prediction. They note the behaviour of engines, and develop an hypothesis to cover it. Engines, they come to see, are organised in a caste system, in which weight and power determine status. The express engine calls imperiously if its way is in the slightest degree impeded, and then lesser fry draw into sidings, signals fall in submission. Engines of the highest caste demand the largest number of little human parasites to stabilise their cross country dashes. These little things rush to clamber aboard at the appointed hour: punctually, according to inexorable Natural Railway Law, the engines start, even leaving some unfortunates to offer their services to a successor. Humbler, slower engines use only inert ballast, which, at command, a mere handful of humans furnish them with. Engines call a good deal on the services of humans, in one way and another. Each carries a valet, and a cook, to feed them while they

journey. But one of the wonders of Nature, report our visitors, is the way that humans assist them in reproduction. In the same way that some earth growths are fertilised by other lowly creatures, so, in their nesting grounds at Swindon, Crewe, and elsewhere, engines can only reproduce themselves with human aid. Engine genetics is a fascinating study. In knowledge of its details, our visitors admit that they have far to go. But the main lines of engine evolution have already been made clear – adaption to environment, and specialisation are clearly indicated in the development from 'single wheelers', through engines with increasing numbers of driving wheels, to Atlantics, Moguls, and Pacifics. Organic adaptation has kept pace, with the significant step forward from low pressure to high pressure compound, and so on to diesels.

The basic assumption that humans exist for engines, as ancillary to their function, reproduction, and general enjoyment of life need scarcely be questioned. The hypothesis once advanced by a rather eccentric minority, that these creatures of such power, and beauty, and precision, and durability, should merely exist for human people is a paradox too fanciful to merit serious consideration. The case for Natural Railway Law has in fact been strengthened by the way in which it has been able to accommodate instances when the Law was apparently broken by anomalous journeys. These were quite apart from the normal seasonal fluctuations – engines of high caste obviously preferring to make their journeys more numerous at the time of year when the weather is more favourable. The so-called Derby Day deviation was observed years before, but put down to faulty observation, until confirmed instances at other times resulted in the brilliant work of XYZ, who by his famous Cup Final Correction was able to predict successfully these occasional effects. Our visitors regard their Railway Law as now unquestionably established, and as one of the great achievements of their science.

The small 'engines for people' school has in fact lost any sort of influence, having failed to establish its case. This apparently rested on one or two curiosities, no doubt much

inflated in being related for propaganda purposes. It was claimed, for instance, that on one occasion, an engine of low caste – a very old Drummond – made a journey in which it enjoyed all the privileges of an engine of the highest caste. Moreover it chose a section of the line long since ignored by responsible engines. Its human ballast was claimed to be far in excess of normal: not only this, but other humans gathered in large numbers at the stations en route, without apparently being ordered to do so, merely being there to witness the engine's passing. What is claimed in this case is that the humans actually willed the engine to make this journey at this particular time; that they initiated the whole thing, and actually derived pleasure, not only from travelling, but even from watching.

Now of all the millions of journeys so uniformly observed and confirmed, only one or two of this kind can be pointed to. It is freely admitted, moreover, that the engine never repeated its journey, and indeed the line has not been used since. The vital evidence as to the number and activities of the humans involved is in the very nature of the case uncertain, and reports are conflicting. It may therefore, from a scientific point of view, be safely ignored. The idea that it should form the basis of an entirely new Railway Law would be laughable if it were not so pretentious.

I would emphasise that this is a parable, and not an allegory. That is, it is not intended to attack any particular hypothesis, but to make the point that a hypothesis may account for facts and successfully predict within a limited range of observation, but that from a privileged position of observation a wholly different and more comprehensive picture may appear. I argue for the *possibility* of a privileged position of the world at large, from which our scientific view of it is seen not as false, but as true, though within a larger context of truth. I suggested that there were empirical facts about people which could not be accounted for by seeing them as a sum of bio-chemical and psychological descriptions, minutely comprehensive though these may be. In a rather different way, the same can be true of the natural world. The

oak tree grows because an acorn produced by another oak happens to light upon suitable soil, and favourable conditions for germination attend it. But this does not preclude the possibility of an entirely different causal story from outside the natural order, such that it is proper to say, 'God made this oak tree grow just here', meaning not that God caused the natural world in general, but that he causes features of it separately. Then we can regard the uniformity of nature as a mechanical thing, but as itself reflecting personal creative concern. We then look for the model of nature's uniformity in terms of steadfastness and habitual action. The laws of nature are unchanging, not with the unchangeable impersonal characteristics of the triangle. They are unchanging with the steadfastness, the faithfulness of the Divine Person. Our model is the good man, not the accurate chronometer.

The 'religious fact' of miracle

This in fact happens to be the way that the ancient Hebrews looked at nature. Yahweh created the world, and maintains it by continuous activity, by personal and immediate control. The fixed orderliness of the natural world was recognised, its regularity being guaranteed by God's promise to Noah that 'while the earth remaineth, seed time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease' (Genesis 8: 22). But this regularity was the product of successive and repeated acts, by which God 'was not wearied' (Isaiah 40: 28). So 'He gives snow like wool, he scatters the hoar frost like ashes, he casts forth his ice as crumbs . . . he covers the heavens with clouds, he prepares rain for the earth, he makes the grass spring forth upon the hills' (Psalm 147: 8f). God's conservation of the world was indistinguishable from its creation – it was in fact continuous creation. All nature is a manifestation of God, and was to be seen as God's personal acts.

The miraculous for the Hebrews, and in the Old Testament, was simply an intensification of God's evident power, a focusing of it upon some special place or occasion. 'But', says

H. Wheeler Robinson,[1] 'the merely physical event would not become a miracle until it found an interpreter in Yahweh's prophet.' He continues:

'Interpretation is inseparable from miracles of the Old Testament pattern. We begin at the wrong end if we try to rationalise them, and to reduce them to their smallest nucleus of historical event. We should begin rather with the faith of both prophet and people, by which the events of the physical world, normal and abnormal, were interpreted in a particular context of history. All nature, as we have seen, is potentially miraculous, and continually manifests the wonders of God. At particular points of time and space this wonder may be intensified, or given a new meaning by its interpretation in a new context. The prophetic interpretation creates the *religious* fact, just as the relation to God transforms moral evil into the religious fact of "sin". . . . It is only when the event is lifted into the realm of the personal relation between God and man, the realm of faith, that the triple sequence of prayer, providence and miracle becomes intelligible, without losing its profound mystery. Prayer, providence, miracle, alike depend on the reciprocity of God and man in the unity of the religious fact. The glory of sunrise and sunset depend on the atmosphere of the earth as much as on the sun's relation to it. The commonest act of perception is a complex unity of the subjective and objective factors. Why should not this be true of the act of religious perception which constitutes faith?'

For the Christian, too, the whole spatio-temporal order is mysteriously under God's hand. But certain events are marked by a focusing of his power; they become, as it were, transparent, disclosing a supra-temporal order of causation, and at the same time revealing some measure of the majesty and compassion of the Divine Person.

[1] *Inspiration and Revelation in the Old Testament*, p. 43f.

9
Some Practical Implications

So far we have been thinking through some of the central Christian conceptions expressed in the terms soul, God, Trinity, prayer, providence and miracle, and trying to justify their use, and relate them in a comprehensive system of thought. I have taken as the key feature the experience of singularity in human persons. I take this to point to the singularity of a Supreme Person whom we call God, about whom we speak in the language of analogy, and to whom we apply a variety of images. The claim of miracle we saw to be that this Supreme Person operates through the world of nature, and in history. In the last chapter we saw the sort of view of the world around us, and our perception of it, that Christian thinking seems to demand. I have been putting forward a philosophy of the Christian faith modelled on the empirical fact of the relation of human persons to one another. The Christian claims that this mutual activity of knowledge between persons is analogous to a possible experience of a similar mutual activity between human persons and God. We now come to consider briefly some of the practical implications of such a philosophy for our living. How do we pass from the ordinary person-to-person experience, to the person-to-God experience which Christians claim is the proper destiny of man?

Faith

Our point of departure might well be the expression 'Christian Faith'. The word 'faith' here is ambiguous. So far we have been considering its meaning as 'the faith' – the traditional claims about God and the world handed down through nine-

teen hundred years of Christian living. But it has of course that other meaning which connotes the individual's attitude to this tradition. People commonly speak of 'having faith'. Accepting the Christian view, and the Christian way of life is said to be, in the end 'a matter of faith'. We saw that all the arguments about God and Christ presuppose a belief in Him – in other words, presuppose faith in this sense. We traced Christian philosophising back to a personal experience – an experience of personal relationship with God in Christ.

Many people do not enjoy this experience. At some time in their lives, if they are brought up in Christian homes, they come to expect some special experience, especially when they are confirmed, or admitted to full membership of their church. Being not uncommonly disappointed in this expectation, they come to feel that whatever this Christian experience is, it is not for them. They may feel that somehow it is through their fault. Or they may come to think that the whole thing is an imposture. In either case, they are prone to say, 'I have lost my faith'. This notion of faith as something which at one time one can 'have', and then, unfortunately, 'lose', as you might lose the gold watch that uncle gave you, is one which needs some examination.

The popular notion of faith is that it describes a mental feeling – an attitude towards certain statements about the Christian religion – the statements of creeds, for example. Faith is taken to be a feeling of certitude, about assertions, as distinct from questions of certainty. (We considered the distinction between the two terms earlier, p. 29.) So, popularly, 'having faith' is thought of as a feeling of unquestioning acceptance, or a warm and churchy feeling about all that we are taught to believe about Christianity. This faith is felt to be meritorious – indeed, the merit increases the more unlikely the 'beliefs'. This mistaken view of what faith means to Christians is widespread – for instance, A. J. Ayer, in a recent broadcast discussion said, 'Credulity is belief against the evidence: faith is belief without any evidence'.

Let us look at what the Bible has to say about faith. I have already drawn attention to the fact that Greek ideas of the

wise man's attitude to ultimate truth was one of contemplation. So the images he uses are the images of sight. The words 'theory' and 'theorem' are from the same seeing word as 'theatre'. We use the same sort of image when we say, 'I would like to believe it, but I just can't see it'. In contrast, for the Hebrews, God was not something to be simply contemplated in elevated thought. God was known by what he did, and by the Word which he uttered. The images of the Hebrew are therefore of 'hearing', not seeing. God's words were his commands, so to hear and to obey are synonymous in Hebrew. God was known in the moral and personal situation of obedience to his expressed commands. Man *ought* to *know* God, in the sense that he ought to continue in this relationship of obedience. To disobey is to reject God, so ignorance of God is culpable. God's steadfastness must be matched by a steadfastness, or faithfulness, in man. This was the intimate personal relationship which he offered: 'I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the Lord.' Hosea thus expresses Yahweh's purpose, in prophetic writing in which the image of the most intimate relation between man and wife is presented as the norm for the relation between Yahweh and Israel.

Turning to the New Testament, we see that 'belief' and 'faith' are the same word *pistis*. 'Faith comes by hearing' (Romans 10: 17). Hearing comes by the characteristic Christian activity of preaching. Once more, hearing the word and obeying it are equivalent – *hupakouein* is to obey by hearing. Faith is never simply assent to statements. An apparent exception is in the letter of James (2: 19): 'Thou believest that God is one, thou doest well: the devils also believe, and shudder.' But the point of this passage is that merely believing something to be the case is not faith, and has, religiously, no status at all – 'so faith apart from works is dead' (v. 26 of the same passage). No, faith is an obedient personal response to the personal address of God in Christ. The address of God is never in the indicative mood, but in the imperative. Man's response must therefore be obedient *activity*. Jesus' saying, 'He that hath ears to hear, let him hear', is not a platitude, or a call for

attention like the naval 'D'y'hear there'. It is a vital command. So, 'Everyone that heareth my words and doeth them shall be likened unto a wise man . . .' (Matthew 7: 24). Hearing-obeying bring understanding in the Hebraic sense—hence 'Take heed what ye hear . . . hear and understand' (Mark 4: 24, 33). 'To hear, in its full biblical meaning includes both to understand and to obey. Without such understanding and obedience there is no faith. Faith therefore involves personal decision, trust, commitment and obedience; it is wholehearted acceptance of the claim of God upon a man, in the situation in which he exists, with the appropriate response in life and action.'[1]

What this adds up to is that faith is not a feeling, but an activity. It is what, as committed Christians, we do. There is no such 'mental condition' as faith. Nor is there any scriptural warrant for the notion that faith is attained at a specific moment. There is no warrant for talking of it as something which can be gained or lost; nor that it is necessarily characterised by distinctive feeling or emotional colouring. Nor does faith mean that certitude must remain at a constant level. In other words, there come times in the lives of all Christians when deepening reflection may make them feel dubious about this or that statement of the creeds, about some moral claim of the tradition, or the validity of some activity of worship. To doubt, to question, to pass through short or long periods of conflict – this is not to 'lose faith'. Faith is our activity of obedience, the Christian's life long striving to *know* God in this deep personal sense, knowing him in the way appropriate to our singularity of being. Our faith is what we do as Christians. 'Having faith' is in fact as loose and inaccurate a term as 'having measles'. There is no such thing as a measle – what we mean by the expression is that in a certain pathological condition of the body, it behaves in a certain definable way, and exhibits a collection of identifiable symptoms. 'Having faith', then, is an expression which by its form presents the same sort of difficulties as the expression 'having a soul'.

[1] A. Richardson, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

Misleading uses of 'spiritual' and 'supernatural'

The reasons for the relegation of faith to an entirely mental or 'spiritual' area of experience are twofold. First, there was the reaction of the Protestant reformers against the practices of the medieval Church, which they felt had exaggerated the authority of the priesthood for unworthy motives. The Protestant feels that there is no need for an intermediary between man and Christ – that his relationship is directly with the Lord, and therefore neither the priest nor any of his operations are necessary to salvation. The operations of the priesthood are primarily concerned with the sacraments: and the Reformation saw hot debate as to their nature – as to whether the water in baptism, or the bread and wine in the Lord's Supper had in themselves any power or significance. The Protestant view came to be that the material things were symbolic only, of that which is inward and spiritual, and the efficacy of the sacraments depended entirely on the devotional attitude of the worshipper. Second, there was the tendency already mentioned, to try to make man's religious life secure from sceptical attack in the name of science, by removing it to a 'spiritual' sphere which was by definition outside of the scope of scientific investigation. This error was fed by naive misunderstanding on both sides, for instance the foolish protest against Darwin by the Bishop of Oxford; and the equally foolish offer once made to submit the consecrated bread and wine to chemical analysis, in the expectation that this would throw light on the catholic claim as to their nature!

Both of these reasons are in terms of broad generalisations, but I think are justified as presenting the basis for the unfortunate separating of the Christian's religion from the rest of his living – the separation which is represented by the convention that 'a man's religion is his own affair', and that 'one does not discuss religion' – conventions which fortunately are no longer widely observed. Equally mischievous is the wrong sort of division between 'natural' and 'supernatural'. The natural world is for instance taken, in popular thought, to be all that range of experience which is open to systematic in-

vestigation; whilst anythng lying apparently, and at least for the present, outside the range of such investigation, such as psychic phenomena, ghosts, premonitions, second sight, table-rapping, and the rest, are all lumped together as supernatural, and vaguely thought of as being somehow connected with religion, and in fact some sort of evidence for it being true.

To 'fit God into the gaps' left by secular life, or by secular thinking, is hopelessly to misunderstand the fundamental claim of the gospel. The essential fact is that all things are a unity, under God. But we need the word 'supernatural' to remind ourselves that the centre of that unity is not within our present life, but beyond it. The temporal is only seen in its true perspective, when it is seen to be enveloped in the eternal. Spacial metaphors are unavoidable here. We should not, however, think of the natural as opaque, but contained within a mysterious supernature, as an egg is contained within its shell. Rather, the natural is within the supernatural as a net is in the sea, both contained and containing. The Christian religion does not direct us to attend exclusively to another world, which is descried only by the development of a special spiritual faculty. It directs us to see the temporal world as penetrated at all points by the eternal, the natural shot through and through by the supernatural, so that we discern the power and the love of God in the forces of nature and in the faces of our friends.

Faith and doubt

There may appear to be a contradiction in saying that faith is not a matter of emotion tone or feeling of certitude at any particular moment of our lives, and at the same time claiming that the basis of the Christian life is an experienced relationship with God in Christ. To resolve this apparent contradiction, we might examine more closely the situation of those who say that they have 'lost their faith'. Now, a commonplace of Old Testament study concerned with the development of the religion of the Hebrews, is that in early times, and even, in some quarters until the exile, Yahweh was thought of as a

territorial God. That is to say, he was thought of as the God of a particular piece of territory – the kingdoms of Israel and Judah – and of a particular city. So, Isaiah based his confidence on the safety of the capital, on the fact that Jerusalem was Yahweh's city, which he must defend against all comers (II Kings 19: 32f). Similarly, Naaman the Syrian, having been cured by a prophet of Yahweh, carried away two panniers of the soil of Yahweh's land, in the hope that he would note that some of his territory was now elsewhere, and keep an eye on it, and its owner, provided that the appropriate offerings were made (II Kings 5: 17, 18). It is pointed out to us that this is an early stage of development of the Hebrew's understanding of the nature of the true God, at which we can afford to smile. But we cannot afford to smile, for it is still one stage of most peoples' religious development; a stage, even, that some never really grow through.

Consider the child brought up in a Christian home, taken to church, taught to say his prayers, enjoying the happiness of affection and security. He learns to behave in a certain way, by imitation, and also to think in a certain way. He understands that he is 'good' if he does some things, and refrains from others; he is good if he believes in the religion his parents practise. Then, he goes away to school, or college, or work. Here he finds himself in an entirely different atmosphere, a wider community, and a society with different standards. His religion is still closely associated with the environment of early years. God and Jesus and saying his prayers are all part of the warmth and security which attends childhood – what he feels about his religion is inextricably involved with what he feels about home, parents, the kindly vicar, the atmosphere of his 'own' church, and the bedroom where he used to pray, surrounded by his own things. Links with home may continue strong, but inevitably change in their nature. For at the same time he is beginning to develop as an individual, to think his own thoughts, form new associations, and confront new problems. In sixth form, junior common room, or club, he finds an atmosphere quite contrasted to that to which he was accustomed at home. There, to believe was apparently a virtue, and

it was assumed rather than discussed. Here, quite the reverse is the case. Talk and discussion is lively and novel. Here, apparently, it is disbelief which is virtuous. For young people in their first emancipation take readily to scepticism. The natural scepticism of the young is reinforced by the emphasis on the virtues of doubt which has become so much a part of the intellectual climate of our age that we scarcely notice it. The cardinal honesty is to refrain from belief, apparently, and the greatest dishonesty is to entertain it. Rejection of any sort of authority is praiseworthy, and the word 'integrity' is used freely in connection with this attitude.

The young man is intrigued and excited by new arguments and attitudes in the society of his peers. But alone, his ideas are in disarray. The old secure landmarks are disappearing, and the feelings which went with them are fading. And so he speaks of loss of faith. But this is a perfectly normal stage of development. The 'territorial God' of the familiar shrine and hearth has lost his hold. The stage is set for development to religious maturity. Now, real commitment is demanded. This commitment can no longer be made for him, as once it was, by sponsors at baptism, and by home attitudes as a whole. He must make it himself. In practice, it consists of simply carrying on directing the will to God; but now with full personal backing. This can go on at the same time as questioning of the most thoroughgoing kind. It does not mean ceasing to doubt. It is not an intellectual decision to 'swallow it whole'. Nor is it, one hopes, taking refuge in the conception of an infallible book, or in an infallible collection of doctrinal statements. By all means go on doubting; but at the same time go on praying. A student without acknowledged ignorance and desire to know has little chance of academic development. A man without acknowledged doubt has little chance of religious development.

'*I believe in order that I may understand*'

Practice always precedes theory. The effective use of heavier-than-air machines came years before the full theory of flight

was developed. Pilots learned to recover from spins many years before the principle of auto-rotation, and its proper correction, were theoretically worked out. I learned to ride a bicycle at the age of nine or ten. Someone held the rear fork, and I wobbled along until I got the hang of it. When I came to teach my own children to ride, I rediscovered the principle, which I presume I was once told but had forgotten, that you should turn the handlebars to the direction you feel yourself to be falling. This creates a centrifugal force which overcomes the gravity of your fall, and sets you falling in the opposite direction: and so you turn the handlebars in that direction, progressing in a series of curves which gradually become greater in radius. In fact for any given angle of unbalance, the curvature of each course must be inversely proportional to the square of your speed. Does the latter principle help a child to learn to ride? Not in the least. Even if the child were precocious enough to understand it, he would not be able to apply it. We learn a skill first, by trial and error, and by imitation. Analysis comes afterwards, helping us to integrate this particular practice with the rest of our knowledge. It is the same with the practice of faith, and of Christian living itself. We do not wait for theoretical analysis, or for intellectual certainty before we embark on it. But having thus embarked, we are in a position to give some sort of account of it theoretically.

Given this practice of faith, what sort of experience can we expect as its result? Nothing sudden or dramatic. The awareness of God in personal relationship is a gradual growth. The orientation of our will, and thought, and feeling towards Christ over a long period results in the development of what in psychology is called a 'sentiment'. There is increasing certitude, with a corresponding emotion associated with it, which grows out of the earlier complex of feeling. But this is to describe Christian experience in purely psychological terms, as one would describe the mental effect of a purely human relationship on one party to it. The growing personal awareness of God, of the mystery of his love, can no more be described in its nature than can human love. It can only be known by acquaintance. As I have suggested, we become what we are

as persons through our personal relationships – it is these that make persons of us. We fulfil our human destiny when this reciprocal relationship and fulfilment is with the Lord Himself, the experience of which St Paul speaks as being 'in Christ'.

In conclusion, I must say something of what in fact are the essentials of Christian practice. These are prayer, worship, and a distinctiveness of conduct. The full consideration of the latter belongs perhaps to a separate study. The rationale of prayer has to some extent been dealt with. Whilst private devotion is regular and habitual, it is not in any sense a withdrawal from the 'natural' world, an escape to the supposed security of the 'supernatural'. In the General Thanksgiving we pray that we may 'show forth thy praise not only with our lips, but in our lives'. It should not only be the case that we pause to look directly to God in prayer once or twice a day; but that we should, throughout our days, be looking to God through all things. In all our dealings with others, we should be addressing ourselves to them with the same attitudes as in our prayers. Thus 'to open oneself to another *unconditionally* in love *is* to be with him in the presence of God, and that is the heart of intercession. To pray for another is to expose oneself and him to the common ground of our being; it is to see one's concern for him in terms of *ultimate* concern, to let God into the relationship. Intercession is to *be with* another at that depth, whether in silence, or compassion, or action.' (J. A. T. Robinson, *Honest to God*, p. 99.)

The Body of Christ

Many who can at least understand and accept the notion of prayer, nevertheless find difficulty in the notion of public worship – certainly public worship as essential and obligatory. Christianity is essentially societary. It is characterised by the worshipping community. In Russia, before the communist revolution, the Czar, the 'little white father', was, at least ideally, the father of his people, the leader of a great community united in worship. This sense of essential unity under

God was never quite lost through centuries of tragic and sordid history. The custom whereby the lowliest subject could address his sovereign by his familiar Christian name was a constant reminder of this. The importance of this sense of fellowship is not lost under the present regime, and the informal and jocular affability of Comrade Kruschev consciously or unconsciously continued this tradition. 'Togetherness' is a cant term of which we hear a good deal at the moment. It is in fact the nearest English equivalent to *sobornost*, the traditional word in Russian for what should be a social as well as a theological fact. The idea of our own sovereign as head of an Established Church points to the same ideal of the nation as a whole being the worshipping unit.

The Church defines itself as the Body of Christ. As such, its essential communal activity is worship; and worship, for most Christians, is typified by the Lord's Supper, or Eucharist. 'Body', it is to be noted, does not in its New Testament and theological sense mean simply the physical body, for which there is the separate word *sarx*, or flesh. Body or *soma* included body, mind and soul, in fact the whole psychophysical unity of a man, all that makes him what he is. It is the nearest that the New Testament gets to 'personality', and so comes near to our notion of singularity: the individual realising himself in the whole complex of his personal relationships in an environment. Thus the 'resurrection of the body' does not mean anything at all like the reconstitution of a physical organism. It means the continuing identity of the individual, of the human singular, through death, and the continuing relationship with the Divine Singular. With this necessarily goes the continuity of the society of those who are 'sanctified', that is, incorporated into the Messiah's community, at whatever stage of growth towards him, and this is expressed by the rather quaint designation of the 'Communion of saints'.

So the *soma* of Christ is the personality of Christ continuing in the world through the community which he founded. The community of the Church is then Christ active in the world. It is able to fulfil this function because it is informed with Christ's Spirit. This means – however hard a saying this may seem to

some – that the Church is an exclusive community. Entry to this community is by baptism. It is to be noticed that baptism is spoken of regularly in the New Testament as an identification with the death and resurrection of Jesus, by going down into the water, and rising again from it. Baptism is a death, and a rising to newness of life in the Christian community. 'Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death; that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.' (Romans, 6: 3f.) A new man is born, and so a new name, or Christian name, is given. (The suggestion that baptism is a symbol of cleansing hardly appears at all in the New Testament.)

The life of the early Christians was from the first that of a closely knit community, with an intense awareness of newness of life in *sobornost*. 'Hereby we know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren.' (I John 3: 14.) The joyful assurance that they shared the risen life of their Lord was centred on the celebration of the Eucharist at their meetings. In the 'breaking of the bread' he was in very fact with them once more. Christian worship, in the fullest sense, comes before any formulation of Christian belief. So we do not say we go to church because we believe in Christianity, but we believe because we go to church. As we saw earlier, the performance of any operation usually precedes rather than follows the working out of its theoretical basis. This is especially true of worship. 'The Christian faith is this,' says the Athanasian Creed, 'that we *worship* one God in Trinity . . .' It does not say that the faith is that we *believe*. We can, and must, worship before belief can come to be adequately formulated; as we can effectively pray before a philosophically viable account of prayer can be given. Christian doctrine is an intellectual account of what is done in worship. In fact the criterion of doctrine and its philosophical support is in the end the extent to which it does justice to what is *done*.

Christians are divided to some extent as to what precisely

happens in the Eucharist, though they are for the most part generally agreed that here the worshipper is somehow especially near his Lord, and that this operation is essential to the Christian life; also, he is by it brought especially near to his fellow Christian. There is a quaint usage, at least in the Church of England, which refers to 'corporate communion' in the interest of this or that special group within the church. But this usage is redundant: because every Eucharist is corporate, or it is nothing. Parallel to this is the notion of making 'my' communion; whereas in fact, of course, it is always 'our' communion with the Lord – sealing and strengthening our special relationship with one another through the strengthening of our special relationship with him in his very presence. The idea presented in the last chapter, of the continuous creative activity of God, which may be focused on this or that place or event with added intensity, should not make it difficult to envisage a rationale of the Eucharist, whereby God's power is therein uniquely operative. It is here that, through elements of the material world, he is in the special circumstances of collective personal address to him, responsive through those elements, in the fullness of his Divine Life, to human need, to human aspiration, and to human love.

APPENDIX I

Some notes on Plato and Aristotle

Not only in philosophy, but in all branches of learning, one cannot go far without being confronted at some point with Plato or Aristotle. Our science, our literature, even our ordinary language owes debts to them of which we are often scarcely aware. The reader is warmly recommended to read one of the many excellent popular introductions to their thought, such as W. K. C. Guthrie's *The Greek Philosophers*. Professor Whitfield's *Philosophy and Religion* and C. E. M. Joad's *Philosophy* both have very readable sections on Plato. My purpose here is not to give a comprehensive account, but to indicate some points of interest relevant to our subject, and also to amplify the references made to them in Chapters 4 and 5.

The Sophists, Socrates, and Plato

The intellectual and social climate to which the thought of Socrates and his friend and pupil Plato was a reaction is not unfamiliar to us in the modern world. During the fifth century B.C., the period of Athens' greatness, the hold of traditional belief and morality weakened. Polytheistic religion had been inherited from an earlier, agricultural stage of development, and it was inadequate to hold the attention of sophisticated city dwellers. Greek intellectuals either attacked or ignored it. But it remained the official state religion. Moral and civil laws ceased to be regarded as of divine origin; they were regarded rather as conventions of social and political convenience. Something like a theory of 'social contract' was held to be the origin of the state law. The more radical claimed that law simply represented the advantage of the stronger – that is, laws were the rules made by the powerful with the aim of sustaining their privilege. In a world in which the unscrupulous adventurer, in

politics or commerce, reaped a rich reward, it was difficult to maintain the old-fashioned virtues. There were no universal standards, apparently; there was no higher criterion of conduct than what seemed best to each man at a particular moment. Early efforts in philosophy, too, had produced a scepticism about the very possibility of certain knowledge, offering as it did alternative views of the world apparently far removed from common sense.

The ordinary man tended to concentrate on success in his private enterprises, and the exciting business of public life. The need for education for these objects produced a class of professional teachers – the Sophists. They were itinerant lecturers, who claimed to be able to teach anything for which there was a demand – but especially rhetoric, which among a people with a passion for litigation, as well as political, and philosophical debate, was in great demand. Sophists were not philosophers, but they shared something of a philosophical attitude – and this was sceptical. 'As to the Gods,' said Protagoras, 'I cannot know whether they exist or not; too many obstacles are in the way, the obscurity of the subject and the shortness of life.' He also expresses, with his famous 'Man is the measure of all things', the mood of self-confident individualism – justified, it is true, by the immense achievement of the Greeks in so many fields of human endeavour.

Here then, was a fragmentation of knowledge into specialisms, coupled with confidence in the human mind and its ability to meet and master environment. Political and military failure was already beginning to undermine the general optimism, however, and there was an underlying moral and spiritual malaise which was soon to prove fatal to the city state. Nevertheless, the majority of citizens enjoyed leisure and affluence (free citizens, that is; for they were outnumbered many times by the huge slave population). Free discussion at a pretty high level on every conceivable subject was a national pastime. In fact, the discussion group as a substitute for moral decision may be said to be a Greek invention.

It was scepticism, and moral relativism, as represented by the Sophists that Socrates set himself to combat. They claimed

to teach *arete* in any particular subject. *Arete* means competence, skill, or excellence at some activity or other. Expertise, or the vulgarism 'know how' is probably the nearest contemporary equivalent. There is an *arete* of the soldier or the rhetorician or the craftsman. Is there, asked Socrates, an *arete* of a man, simply as a man? And if so, how do we set about finding out what it is?

Socrates' answer is that there is such a human *arete*. He gives to the word the meaning which henceforth becomes its stock translation – 'virtue'. For the *arete* of the human being as such is a moral quality. Now to achieve efficiency in any craft or profession we have thoroughly to understand the job – what it aims at, and how its aims are to be achieved. So we must understand the business of living, and we must clarify what it is that constitutes human virtue. We do this by examining all the situations and deeds to which words of approbation, such as just, brave, temperate are applied; and we determine what quality they have in common. Thus we will arrive at the *concept* of virtue. This is the method of *induction*, which Socrates discovered, or at least first pointed to as a valid method of argument. It is the appropriate procedure for formulating any sort of concept. The concept 'horse', for example, is the result of examining many different animals, and noting that, in spite of individual differences, there is a large group with basic qualities held in common. In using the concept, we apply to it any new animal that comes to our notice, and decide whether it fits the concept – whether, that is, it is a horse. For if we form our concept properly, it will amount to a complete *definition* of a horse. Definitions are the same for everybody, and they can be communicated from man to man. True concepts can in this sense be regarded as objective.

And the same is true of the concept of virtue. It is our duty to find out what true justice is. When we find it, we have a definition. Like other definitions, it may be taught. In fact, all the individual moral qualities, Socrates says, have a common quality – there is an overall concept of virtue – 'Virtue is one'. And virtue is to be taught. We might object that it is one thing to teach the idea of virtue, and quite another to teach

people to be virtuous. No, says Socrates. All men do what they imagine is good, but some are mistaken as to what goodness is. Once a man knows what is right, he will do it. Such a claim, so at odds with experience, strikes us as strange. But two factors make it explicable. First, Socrates was himself a man of such strength of character that for him to know the right was indeed to do it. Second, the meaning which he and Plato gave to 'know' was something much deeper and more significant than mere intellectual assent. To this we must give some attention.

The Ideas, the Soul, and Knowledge

Socrates had claimed to show that morality was not relative, but that there were moral concepts which were unchanging, and accessible to the mind of man. But this, for Plato, was not enough to guarantee the pre-eminence of goodness, to make it an essential characteristic of the whole world of men and nature. What gave to the concept of Virtue its compelling force? Plato's answer lay in his Theory of Ideas. Concepts are the same for all men, not because all men think the same, more or less. Concepts are unchanging because what they refer to are *real things.*

Common sense says that the real things are the particular things in the world which the senses perceive, and that concepts are only names of classes, or useful mental pictures. Plato reverses this commonsense view. Concepts are real, things in the world are not. How can this be? We do not perceive 'horse', as a concept. We only perceive individual examples of horses. Quite right, says Plato, because what is real is not perceived by the senses at all. Concepts are known by the mind. He calls them Ideas, from the word *eidos* meaning form or external shape. The word Idea can be misleading to us, because we naturally associate it with mental operation. But they do not exist in minds, nor even in the mind of God. They exist in their own right. But if they cannot be perceived by the senses, where are they then? The answer is that they form a world of their own, beyond this one, beyond space and

time – a world of perfect entities, each eternal, immutable, and perfect of its kind. Our world is only a poor copy of the world of Ideas; an ever-changing kaleidoscope, which at best can suggest to us the perfection which lies beyond, and can remind us of a world we have lost for the space of our earthly life.

For the real part of each man is that which at birth descended from this real world, and which at death may ascend to it again. The real part of man is his soul – *psyche*. Socrates and Plato took this word which referred to the feeble ghost of traditional animistic belief, and used it to denote the whole moral and intellectual personality. The psyche is immortal, as belonging to the world of Ideas. It is in fact a composite structure, and to describe it Plato uses the model of a chariot. There is the charioteer, the rational part of the soul – the intellect driving and directing the whole. Its energies lie in the irrational part, the emotions. Well-schooled horses are the nobler emotions. Their yoke-fellows are wild and erratic, though powerful and useful. These are the base emotions. The driver must manage his team, and make them pull together towards the goal. The unifying force in the well-ordered soul is *eros* – the longing for a good unattained.

Knowledge is the proper activity of the soul. Things perceived by the senses are in a continual state of change, and therefore cannot be the objects of knowledge. Of the visible world we can have only ideas varying in degrees of probability, not deserving of the name of knowledge, but called by Plato 'opinion'. Knowledge is always the embracing by the rational soul of something fully existing, and the only thing that qualifies for this is the Idea. We use the world around us to lead us to the ideas. We consider individual cases, for instance, of beauty, such as a beautiful woman, or a beautiful scene, or building. But we pass on from these to consider their common quality, and so come to know Beauty as it is in itself – the Idea of Beauty. It is not that we have been instructed by the senses as to what Beauty is. Things in the world are said to 'participate' in their perfect forms among the Ideas. So all examples of beauty in the world are pale copies of true Beauty. Their

office is not to instruct, but to remind us of the Beauty we knew before birth.

For Socrates and Plato, knowledge is an activity of the whole personality, a seeing 'with the eye of the soul' – a full and compelling insight into what is true and good and beautiful, with all our powers. If we once have this vision, wrong-doing is unthinkable. Knowledge itself is a moral achievement, the end of a passionate and unswerving quest for truth. And this philosophical insight brings with it the obligation of service to others, as Plato indicates in his famous allegory of the Cave.[1]

There are of course many difficulties and anomalies in Plato's system of thought, such as the relations which subsist between our world and the Ideas, and among the Ideas themselves; and these are examined in the handbooks. Despite such critical questions, the imaginative sweep of Plato's philosophy, the loftiness of its aspiration, and its many penetrating insights, have held the minds of men of all ages since. In fact the history of European philosophy has been said to be the history of Platonism. Its influence on Christianity has been considerable and continuous, from the New Testament onwards. Platonic elements appear both in the Johannine literature, and in the Epistle to the Hebrews. St Augustine, called the Christian Plato, had been a student of the Neo-Platonists Plotinus and Proclus. It remained, with a brief interlude of Aristotelianism in the thirteenth century, the dominant Christian philosophy of the Middle Ages, and survives in the modern world.

To an extent, Plato was influenced by circumstances, and was a child of his age. His famous *Republic*, in which he seeks to discover the Idea of the State, and of Justice in it, bears this out. An aristocrat by birth, he was contemptuous of the Athenian democracy, the more so as it had destroyed his master Socrates. He admired the rigours of Sparta, and the rigid caste system of Egypt. His ideal state is totalitarian. But it must be remembered that he shared the contemporay view

[1] At the beginning of Book VII of his 'Republic'. (p. 207f. A. D. Lindsay's translation. Everyman 1945.)

that history was cyclic – there was no conception of 'progress'. So that change, political and social, is always towards decadence and decline; for the Golden Age lay, for the ancients, always in the past. The first virtue of a state was stability – resistance to the onset of decay. Only Christianity held out a hope for the future. St Augustine was a man of both worlds, and in him the two views meet. In his *City of God* he sees that the city of this world must inevitably fall; but his eyes are set on the city of God's founding which even now is growing among the ruins.

The 'other-worldliness' beloved of Christian piety of the rather old-fashioned sort, is in origin Platonic, rather than scriptural; as is the contrast between 'above' and 'below', and the division between spiritual and material. Other more technical drawbacks in the language and concepts of Plato and Aristotle as vehicles of Christian thought and discourse are noted in the next Appendix. Nevertheless, the importance and value of Plato's basic contentions remain.

He insists that knowledge is not simply cognitive; the word can only properly be applied to a situation in which the connative element is also present. That is, it is not only a matter of the receptiveness of the mind. Will and emotion are involved. Knowledge is an activity of the whole soul; it is the object of the passionate longing of the wise man. Moreover, he claims that the thinking and knowing of the philosopher must be about real objects. There is a reality beyond the world of sense which is accessible to the soul of man, because he is somehow akin to it. Though his talk of God is from our point of view ambiguous, for Plato it is certain that the universe is ultimately good and rational. Like Keats, he is persuaded of the 'holiness of the heart's affections'; and man is not deceived in his aspirations. It is inconceivable that the highest activity of the rational soul of the good man should be mocked by an environment which is ultimately impenetrable to his mind and indifferent to his hopes. This is the fundamental assumption of the metaphysician and of the religious man.

Aristotle's 'First philosophy'

Plato left behind him a corpus of writings of high literary merit. Aristotle was survived by his lecture notes. The fact points to the difference between these two great men. If Aristotle seems matter of fact and prosaic after Plato's imaginative artistry, he was prosaic on a prodigious scale. He has something of value to say in every field of human enquiry, from metaphysics to midwifery. Overarching his whole thought was what he called his 'First Philosophy', or basic metaphysic, and with this we are here concerned.

He rejects Plato's theory of ideas, on the ground that it fails to explain why the world is here, and this to him is the main problem of philosophy. His answer to the problem is his 'hylomorphic' or 'matter-form' theory. To understand it, we must first look at his analysis of causation. He distinguishes four kinds of cause – the final, the formal, the efficient, and the material causes. If you ask 'What caused that house?', one answer might be the house itself, as the achieved end of a project. Someone wanted a house like this, which set a whole process of designing and building in motion. This he calls the final cause – the end to be achieved. The particular architectural features of the house we find in the architect's drawings – this is the formal cause, which makes the house the shape it is and not otherwise. Architects are no good without builders to bring his plan into being. These are the actual moving force – the efficient cause. Bricklayers and joiners cannot build without bricks and mortar – and these are the material cause.

First there is the conception of the completed house, then the designing, then the actual building. These represent the three causes which give organisation and distinctive character and shape to the product. They all contribute to the *form* of the house; and the form is impressed on *matter*. So we arrive at the two fundamental categories which make a thing what it is – form, and matter. Everything that exists has been brought into existence by the combination of matter and form. 'Form' stands for the essential qualities which make a thing what it is. 'Matter' is the stuff on which the form is imposed.

Now, although we can *think* of matter and form separately, they can never exist separately. You cannot have qualities without a thing to have them, any more than you can have a thing without qualities. So matter and form are abstractions.

Matter in this sense must not be confused with our meaning of the word. Matter for Aristotle is featureless – an abstraction which only takes on features when it acquires form. Matter is potentially anything. Whatever gives matter definiteness as this or that, is its form. Form gives actuality to the potentiality of matter. Form includes all shape, colours, qualities, organisation of parts, and functions. Matter is *potentiality*, form is *actuality*. Clay, for instance, is matter-plus-form, the form being a certain colour and consistency. But clay is potentially a brick. Perform the right operation, and the 'higher' form of brick is impressed on it. The matter-plus-form of clay can be seen as the matter which contributes to the matter-plus-form of brick. And the matter-plus-form of brick is the matter which is potentially a building – a still higher form. Potentially any kind of building, bricks become an actual building when they are aranged in rooms and corridors, according to the form of a house.

In fact you may see everything in the world arranged in a hierarchy, or order, a scale of being of which the extremes are matter with a minimum of form at the bottom (such as rock), and at the top, the most elaborate forms (such as organisms). Things are always changing towards higher forms, as the simple form of the acorn achieves the higher form of the oak tree. It is the drive towards higher forms which we call change and motion. Thus the true cause of change is the end to be achieved, the potentiality to be actualised. It seems to us that motion and change is produced by a mechanical propulsion, but this is just the efficient cause. The really significant cause is the final cause, for this is the end to be achieved, and is the ultimate ground of motion.

Notice here a fundamental difference between all our scientific thinking and that of the ancient world. The conception of the end to be achieved by a process is more important, both to Plato and Aristotle, than the mechanics of its achievement.

Teleology, from the Greek *telos* (=end) is the name given to the consideration of ends. Our science has been strikingly successful on the basis of 'efficient cause' only. Darwin's theory of natural selection, which succeeds in accounting for the distribution of species with reference only to efficient causation, is an ingenious and remarkable *tour de force*. The beauty and economy of such hypotheses as the general evolutionary theory induces in modern man a habit of mind, and a tendency to look for total explanation without teleological reference. As I suggested in the chapter on the soul, the whole which is more than a sum of its parts is inexplicable in these terms.

The orderly and purposive scale of being, related in gradations of form, Aristotle sees as the manifestation of Reason – a Reason which informs the whole process, without being deliberate or conscious. The element of reason is in fact equated with form, and form is the first principle of the universe. Since the universe is eternal, then matter is co-eternal with form; but in fact he gives form precedence, crediting it with greater 'reality'. Aristotle has a further problem. All motion is regarded as the result of attraction to an end. What is the end to which the whole universe is attracted?

Now, at the two ends of our scale of being, we may say that logically there is at the bottom matter completely devoid of form, and at the top, form completely devoid of matter. These are only logical possibilities however – you cannot have any existent thing which is not a combination of both. But at this point Aristotle abandons consistency. The end of the whole universe is, above and beyond it Form-in-itself, pure form with no matter – and this is God. Being pure form, he is not potentially anything else – he is fully 'actual', there being nothing higher to which he can aspire. He is the final cause of the universe, which as we saw (p. 78) moves it by 'appetition'. As the Unmoved Mover, the cause of motion, he is its efficient cause. And as the source of the Reason which informs and shapes it, he is its formal cause. But matter is pre-existent, and forever distinct from God. No Greek philosopher conceived of a creator God in the Christian sense. 'On the Greek side',

says Etienne Gilson, 'stands a God who is doubtless the cause of all being, including its intelligibility, efficiency and finality – all save existence itself; on the Christian side a God who causes the very existence of being. On the Greek side we have a universe eternally informed, and eternally moved; on the Christian side a universe which begins to be by creation. . . .' (*Spirit of Medieval Philosophy*, p. 81.)

Finally, we may notice the wide-ranging use to which Aristotle was able to extend his theory, by seeing its operation in just one field, which is not irrelevant to our study. This is the field of psychology. The soul, he says, is the form of the body. In sense perception, the soul takes into itself the form of the things perceived, but not its matter. The sense organ must be potentially what the sensed object or quality is actually – so perception makes the organ actually for the time being of the same quality as the object. Isolated sensations, say of touch, sight, and smell have to be organised into wholes for us to recognise things. This is done by the 'common sense organ' – located by him in the heart. (Our use of the expression common sense derives from Aristotle through Cicero.) Sense organs may continue to be excited after the actual perception has taken place, and memory consists of the intelligent recognition of such persisting images. Recollection is the deliberate evocation of past images for the purpose of thought. In reasoning, the understanding is the matter; things and relations between them which enter from outside are the forms. Getting to understand the world is the process by which our understanding receives more and more complete form from the outer world. Hence our expression 'well-informed'. Ordinary reason is inseparable from matter – the claim that the soul is the form of the body obviously involves the denial of immortality. Aristotle never quite escapes the influence of his old master, Plato. And in two rather obscure passages, he seems to suggest that there is another meaning of reason in man – a reason which *is* separable from matter, and, being part of the divine reason, immortal. In the Christian Aristotelianism of the Middle Ages, this becomes the 'rational soul' directly created by God.

APPENDIX II

Language and models in early Christian doctrine

Limitations of the Greek philosophical tradition

Theological dispute and difficulty arose in the early centuries of the Church's life from two related causes. The first was the nature of the philosophical language available, and the second was the limitations of the models used. The language was primarily Hellenistic Greek; and its philosophical usages reflected the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle.

Greek thought had ignored the Singular. Plato was concerned with the World of Ideas. The ideas alone could be proper objects of knowledge. Things in the world were only inadequate copies of them – and in any case were in a constant state of change, coming into being and passing away. The mind could not rest in them, so that the mind of man could not really be said to know them. Knowledge was for him the contemplation of the eternal and unchanging ideas.

Aristotle was, as a scientist, concerned with objects in the world, and reckoned them as the units which form the basis of knowledge. They are the objects which the senses perceive. But even for him, the individual, or singular, as such was not known. The individual was simply a particular case of some class of objects. The individual thing was called a 'particular', whilst the class was a 'universal'. Of course, an individual belongs to a large number of different classes. My dog Clinton belongs to the class 'hound', to the much larger class 'four-legged vertebrates', and to the much smaller class 'long-eared hounds'. What we *know* when we are confronted with a particular is the whole range of universals which intercept at this

point. Particulars are *perceived* by the senses, but they are *understood* – recognised for what they are – by understanding the precise collection of universals which they exemplify. The interest of ancient philosophy is therefore in the universals, and not in the particulars. The particular is what is seen when we are in quest of the *conception* of the universal.

For this reason I have used the term singular rather than particular, or individual. It is the singular in John that is loved by Joan as she directs her loving attention towards him – not his particularity as exemplifying a number of universals. And it is the Singular which is the real object of Christian knowing. It was therefore a misfortune that Christian thinkers inherited a philosophical language and technique neither interested in the singular, nor equipped to deal with it.

It may be noted as a matter of philosophical interest that the preoccupation with the universal led to a bitter and protracted controversy in the medieval world. 'This question,' as John of Salisbury described it, 'upon which the world in travail has grown old, to which it devoted more time than the caesars spent in conquering and governing world empire, for which more money was spent than Croesus with all his wealth ever possessed.' It was the question as to whether or not universals were 'real'. If they were objects of knowledge, they must be real things. Moreover, though particular hounds live and die, the class name or 'universal' hound goes on unchanging for ever. It must therefore be more real than the particular. We are not concerned here to follow the fortunes of this argument concerning a belief so contrary, apparently, to common sense. But it is important to see how this conception of universals was sustained by the use of the notion of 'substance'. We have seen that 'substance' was used of an object as distinct from the qualities which it may have. It was defined by Aristotle as the subject to which predicates are applied, as when you say 'This rose is white' – the rose is the substance which has the various qualities of whiteness, softness, fragrance, and so on. Now we can apply these descriptive terms, or predicates, to universals as well, for example 'The

Zebra is a striped animal'. Universals, then, were allowed to be substances. To our earlier criticism we may add this one – it will be noticed that Aristotle defines substance grammatically, that is, as the name given to the subject of a sentence, to which predicates are applied. The mistake, which caused a good deal of difficulty and confusion, was the transferring of what is after all a perfectly good grammatical rule, to the world of things. We now recognise that 'The Zebra' is a term which by the convention of the zoologist is applied to a distinct group of herbivorous quadrupeds; and when we make up sentences with the zebra as subject, we are defining the term zebra by showing the collection of qualities which the convention is designed to cover.

It was a Scottish Franciscan, John Duns Scotus, who insisted that the individual thing was more than an area of intersection of a group of universals, located in a piece of matter. What made it an individual was its 'this-ness' or 'hecceity'. Though we cannot say what this is, we can know it. 'The singular adds an entity over and above the entity of the universal. Consequently the apprehension of the universal is not the complete ground of an apprehension of the singular adequate to all that may be known of the singular.' (*Opus Oxoniense*, IV, 9, 2, 10.)

Effect of these limitations

Following the ways of thought of ancient philosophy, it was natural that early theologians should approach their task of making sense of Father, Son and Spirit as though (*a*) they were speaking of particulars, when they used expressions like Father and Son, in the sense that the Father-Son relationship in God was a particular case of the relationship as it is known in human experience, and (*b*) that they were talking about substances of the 'thing-plus-qualities' order when they spoke of 'divinity', 'humanity', or 'nature' in connection with Christ.

It is not that the early philosophical theologians were naively unaware of the fact that many of their difficulties were caused by their language and its usages. The development of

the doctrine of the Trinity was the achievement of transcending the limits of a sphere of discourse. They realised the strain on their language of what they felt obliged to say. But they were never quite able to escape its presuppositions. They talked, for instance, in terms of substance, as though the divine persons could be manipulated intellectually as objects, in a way which is almost materialist. The discussion relating to the humanity and divinity of Jesus never really escapes from the supposition that humanity and divinity are universals which are mutually exclusive, and that Jesus and Christ are particulars – two substances with qualities which have got to be in the same Person and at the same time. It is with difficulty that discussion about God acting liberates itself from equivocal uses of 'before' and 'after'. It is slowly that there appears the notion that the unity of the one God, and the separateness of the three persons, is not arithmetical, not a case of divine special pleading against the rules of mathematics.

Irenaeus (*c.* 130-202) attacks those who speak of God 'as if they had now measured and thoroughly investigated Him, and explored Him on every side', and says that human reason can only point towards, and not comprehend God – '. . . let him reflect that man is infinitely inferior to God . . . and that he cannot have experience or form a conception of all things like God (*Against Heresies*, 4, 19: 3). Origen (185-254) was the greatest of these early theologians. To Celsus, who had said, 'He cannot be expressed by name', he answered by saying in effect that analogical predication does represent a method of speaking of the Singular. The word sweet, he says, can appropriately be used of both a fig and a date, without fully describing the particular sweetness of either. No individual, he says, can be fully described in general terms; neither can God. 'But if you take the phrase to mean that it is possible to represent by words something of God's attributes, in order to lead the hearer by the hand, as it were, and so enable him to comprehend something of God, so far as attainable by human nature, then there is no absurdity in saying that "He *can* be described by name".' (*contra Celsum* 6, 65.)

'Unity' and 'Logos' as models

For those deeply imbued with the Judaic monotheistic tradition, there was a natural reluctance to develop theological language in any way which might appear to compromise the unity of God. Insistence on the fact that God is One led to talk about the Son and the Spirit being merely different aspects of God, or 'modes' of His operation. Such theories are known as 'Modalist'. They inevitably involved the idea that the Father was crucified, if Christ was really God – a conception known as 'patripassianism' (='suffering father'). Modalists tried to meet the obvious objections to this, by the dubious move of saying that Christ suffered in his 'human nature', not in his divinity. But if the divine Son of God did not suffer in the fullest and most complete sense, the cross becomes simply an incidental martyrdom, and cannot have the central place in the divine activity of redeeming man that Christians have always maintained that it has.

Alternatively, it was said that the three were names of the different ways in which God has dealings with the world, and are not part of God as he is in himself. God is above and beyond them. The objection to this was that it made of Christ a transient phenomenon, coming into being for the purpose of the incarnation, and then ceasing to be.

Oneness as a simply unity was seen in fact to be a very limited model. Of course the models on which early theology had to work were already given, like the obvious, scriptural 'Father and Son' model. There was also the *Logos*, which was both philosophical and scriptural. *Logos* (literally meaning word, but having many additional meanings such as explanation, reason, argument) had already a long history. It was at once the word uttered, the truth which it contained, and the reality to which the name 'Truth' could be applied. As far back as the sixth century B.C. it had been used for the rational principle controlling the world. Later it became a semi-divine principle in pagan religious systems of the more intellectual sort. Philo, an Alexandrian Jewish philosopher who was contemporary with our Lord, had tried to draw Greek philosophy

and Hebrew religion together by identifying Logos with the later Old Testament conception of Wisdom. Thus, the author of St John's Gospel could speak of Jesus as God's Logos, and be understood both by Jew and gentile as claiming for him divine status, and eternal existence. He drives home his point by the bold assertion that this Logos was neither a bare philosophical principle, nor a pious myth, but 'became flesh, and dwelt among us'.

The Logos conception, then, provided a model which had at least the virtue that it was understood to be eternal. But its drawback was that it was not conceived personally in its traditional use. The impersonal overtones clung to it when it came to be used by Christian theologians. It was still somehow an 'it' and not a 'he'. So we get the suggestion that the Logos only *became* a person when Christ was born. Justin Martyr, for instance, seems to understand the Logos to have taken the place of Christ's 'rational soul'. Moreover, the Logos, though divine, as a power, force, or principle, was divine in a subordinate way, carrying out the orders of the supreme God. (Proverbs 8 displays Wisdom as with God before and during the creation. But God is the architect, and Wisdom is the 'master workman'.) This, added to the obvious element of subordination in the Father–Son situation, leads Justin Martyr to say that the Son is subordinate to the Father, and the Spirit, 'in the third rank', subordinate to both. Athenagoras, a Christian philosopher of Athens, writing about A.D. 176, at least sees the danger of the impersonal implications of Logos, and also the danger of 'subordinationism' in the Father–Son model. He claims that the three exist eternally within the unity of the Godhead '[Christians] are guided by this alone – to know the true God and his Word, to know the unity of the Father with the Son, what the Spirit is, what unity exists between these three, the Spirit, the Son, and the Father, and what is their distinction in unity.' But this does little more than state the problem more fully. Eradicating the error of subordination in the Godhead took three or four hundred years. That it *was* an error to be eradicated was the insistent claim of the orthodox. Though it was inherent in all the language and models

available, they rejected any theological constructions which embodied it, however apparently compelling, as being inconsistent with both the full Christian tradition, and their own Christian experience.

A legal model

Not all of these early theologians were Greek speaking. One of the greatest was Tertullian (*c.* 155-230), a Carthaginian, who spoke and wrote in Latin. He it was who first gave Christian thought a Latin vocabulary. He was also first to use the word 'person' of the Trinity, and in a measure he anticipated the conclusions reached nearly two centuries later. His writings exhibit a strong personality; he was rigorous in dispute, caustic in wit, and had a lively style. He reacted strongly against philosophy, in so far as it attempted to explain and absorb Christianity into Hellenistic speculation. For there were at this time, on the fringe of Christianity, a large number of sects, which are in general referred to as Gnostic, and which tried to fit Christ and the Christian gospel into pagan religious systems current in the Hellenistic world. Hence his famous 'What has Athens to do with Jerusalem?' already quoted. 'Let them look to it,' he goes on, 'who have produced a Stoic and Platonic and dialectic Christianity. We need no curiosity who have Jesus Christ, no enquiry who have the Gospel.' Ironically, he represents Jesus as saying, 'I once gave a Gospel and a doctrine to my apostles but afterwards it was my pleasure to make considerable changes in it. I had promised a resurrection; but on second thoughts, it struck me that I might not be able to keep my promise. I had shown myself to be born of a virgin; but this seemed to me afterwards to be a discreditable thing . . .'

Tertullian had a background of legal training, and the model which he conceives for the Trinity seems to have been drawn from this. Three individuals may enjoy the same legal rights over one piece of property. Property thus jointly owned was called *substantia*, and *persona* was the term used to describe a party enjoying such legal rights to it. So he speaks

of the Father, Son and Spirit as parties participating in the commonly held property of Godhead. They are *tres personae in una substantia* – 'three persons in one substance'.

Tertullian goes beyond the legal meaning, indicating a special relationship between the three, as well as equal partnership. But in speaking of this special relationship, he seems unable to avoid the suggestion of subordination, probably under the influence of the Father–Son model. Moreover, the legal model has its own difficulty. We have in fact three 'persons' *plus* the jointly owned property – making four entities in all.

The Father and Son model: Origen's qualifications

Origen made the first moves towards so qualifying the models that their analogical use is made apparent. He insisted that the Logos is personal. 'Let no one, however, imagine that we mean anything impersonal when we call him the wisdom of God; or suppose, for example, that we understand him to be, not a living being endowed with wisdom, but some *thing* that makes men wise.' (*De Principiis*, 2, 2.)

In human terms, the relationship of Father and Son necessarily involves the subordinate status of the Son, and the idea of there having been a time when there was only the Father, before he begets a Son. Origen meets this with the paradox that God the Father 'eternally begets' his Son, and means by this that 'There never was a time when he was not'. 'And who can suppose', he asks, 'that God the Father ever existed, even for a moment of time without having generated His Wisdom?' (1, 2: 2) 'How then can it be asserted that there was once a time when he was not the Truth, the Wisdom, nor the Life, although in all these things he is judged to be the perfect essence of God the Father; for these things cannot be severed from him, or even from his essence.' (4, 28) The Logos was united with the man Jesus in a complete unity, though manhood and divinity remain distinct. As a model of this unity he uses iron in the fire. When heated in a forge, the iron

gradually takes on all the properties of the fire itself, so that it is indistinguishable from fire in appearance and action; yet it remains metal.

Reference in time in relation to God's being in eternity must also, he saw, be clearly signposted as analogical: 'Now this expression which we employ – "that there never was a time when he did not exist" – is to be understood with an allowance. For these very words "when" and "never" have a meaning relating to time, whereas the statements made regarding Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, are to be understood as transcending all time, all ages, and all eternity.' (4, 28.)

St Basil and 'hypostasis': development of conception of 'personality'

When the Church became the official religion of the Roman Empire in 312, the 'subordination' of the Son and the Spirit to the Father had a new lease of life. Many newly converted pagans flooded into the churches. They had been led to believe that Christianity was a monotheistic religion. They were somewhat perturbed to learn of what they took to be, in their partial understanding, a trilogy of Gods. As at all times, there were not lacking churchmen who favoured the idea of 'restating the gospel in modern terms', and 'keeping up with the trend of the times'. One of these was an enterprising priest of the fashionable suburb of Alexandria called Arius, who found that he could achieve this by denying the dictum of Origen, making of the Son a subordinate being by saying that 'there *was* a time when he was not'. In spite of the judgment against him of the famous Council of Nicaea in 325, the issue split the Church for many years afterwards, and the great Egyptian bishop Athanasius spent his life combating the heresy. He insisted that not only the Son, but also the Spirit, was of the 'same nature' as the Father, and not merely of 'like nature'. Peace within the Church on these issues, and in these terms, was largely brought about by a group of churchmen centred on Cappadocia, in Asia Minor, who flourished in the last half

of the fourth century. The leader, and most able thinker of this party was St Basil of Caesarea (329-79).

At last, the relationship of persons, in the modern sense of the word, was used as a model. St Basil succeeded in popularising, and defending, a formula which preserves both the unity of the Godhead, and the distinctiveness of the Three. Two Greek words were involved. One was *ousia* meaning 'being', and the other was *'hypostasis'*. *Ousia* was to be used from henceforth for the unity, and *hypostasis* for the Persons. *Hypostasis* was not a new word; but it was being given a new meaning – a meaning for which, in fact, Hellenistic Greek had not catered, that of 'personality', in the sense in which that word could be used of the Three. There were formidable difficulties in the way of its acceptance. In the first place, in earlier debate, *ousia* and *hypostasis* had been used as synonyms. Further, *hypostasis* by derivation means 'standing under', and so 'supporting qualities'. In fact, it has the precise overtones which 'substance' has in Latin. 'Substance' was, in the West, the obvious way of referring (as Tertullian had done) to the unity of God. When the theologians of the West heard the Greek theologians of the Eastern Mediterranean speaking of 'three hypostaseis', they were naturally alarmed, thinking that they were speaking of three Beings. But what the Cappadocians were doing was working to establish the convention of making a vital difference between *ousia* and *hypostasis*, so that the latter lost its old connotation. *Ousia* alone was to be used for the unified Being; *hypostasis* for the distinctive existence of the Three in their particular modes – that is, for the *ousia* of the Godhead given singularity as Father, as Son, or as Spirit. *'Hypostasis'*, says St Basil, 'is not the indefinite conception of *ousia*, which, because what it signifies is common to all, finds no fixity; but that which by means of the special characteristics or properties which are made apparent, gives fixity and circumscription to what is common and uncircumscribed.' (*Epistle* 38.)

Hypostasis is in fact used for the uniqueness, the singularity of the Persons of the Trinity. *Persona*, it was agreed, should be the Latin translation of the new term. (It is from this theo-

logical usage that we derive our understanding of the words 'person' and 'personality'. Before, it lacked its present depth of meaning.) The Cappadocians were striving towards a *dynamic* notion of the divine personalities, driving through the limitations of the substance-accidents language of the Greek tradition, with its near materialist background and imagery, which had limited its operators to a mechanical, structural view of the Trinity. Thus Gregory of Nyssa, another of the Cappadocians, insists that *ousia* signifies operation rather than static being. The operations of God are always the work of the three Persons together, 'without mark of time or distinction – since there is no delay, existent or conceived, in the motion of the divine will from the Father, through the Son, to the Spirit'.

They were well aware of the failure of mechanical models. The Trinity is not to be understood, for instance, as the quaternity which Tertullian seemed to suggest – the three persons plus the original substance in which they shared. The divine substance is not parcelled out between them; it exists from the beginning in three hypostaseis, God in Three Persons. The Cappadocians insisted on the paradox that each person was distinct, yet all were fully involved in the operation of each. They insisted on the paradox that though they are three, no numerical language is appropriate to them – they cannot be counted and summed, in an arithmetical way: 'If this divine simplicity exists in modes of being, these are not three in relation to each other, so that we can, as it were, count them, one, two, three; but the Father is One, the Son is One, the Spirit is One.' (St Basil: *De Spiritu Sancto*, 43, 44.) So the very use of 'three' is analogical.

What some have described as the 'bankruptcy' of Greek theology was really the point at which the ablest of these theologians broke through the limits of their language to the conception of the Singularity of the Personal. They pointed the direction which Christian experience of God must take as it freed itself from these limitations.

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